JOHN McCAIN—THE DEMOCRATS' BEST HOPE Jonathan Chait

THE NEW REPUBLIC

ARUNDHATI ROY'S ERRORS
Ian Buruma

ISAAC BABEL'S SPARKS
Irving Howe

WHAT WE WILL BECOME

A SECULAR INQUIRY INTO THE ETHICS OF RESEARCH CLONING
Charles Krauthammer

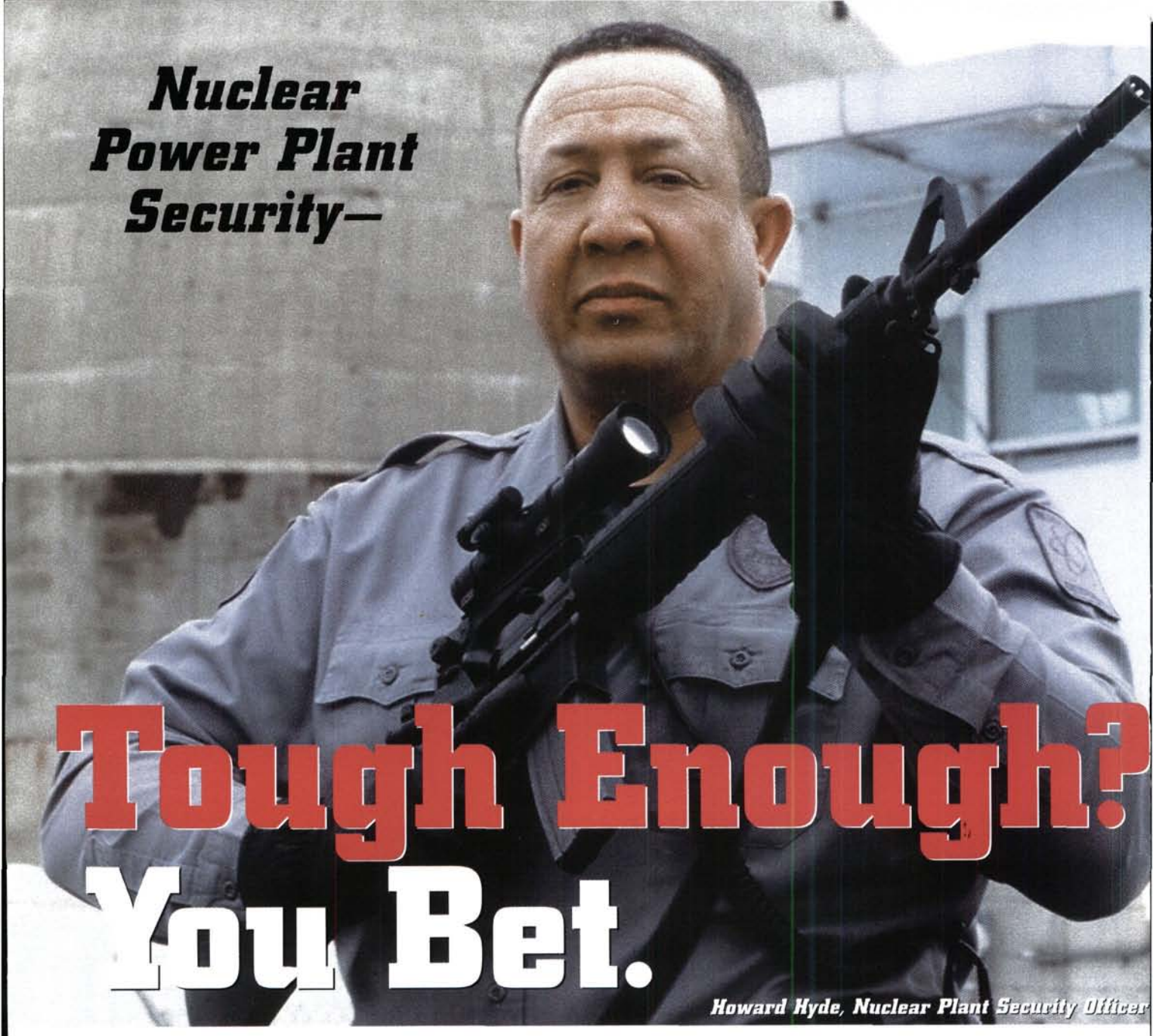
APRIL 29 2002

#BXBKDML ********5-DIGIT 94301
#TNR000006817I/5#77 05JAN04
RON K UNZ
555 BRYANT ST # 371
PALO ALTO CA 94301-1704

5
21713
1443

17>

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Nuclear Power Plant Security—

Tough Enough? You Bet.

Howard Hyde, Nuclear Plant Security Officer

Meet Howard Hyde. Former U.S. Army helicopter pilot. Tai Kwon Do champion.

The security of America's nuclear power plants begins with the highly committed... highly trained... well-compensated professionals who protect them. Howard Hyde has what it takes.

Like Hyde, 70% of the security professionals who protect America's nuclear power plants have prior military, law enforcement, or industrial security experience.

Meet Howard Hyde— Former U.S. Army helicopter pilot and Tai Kwon Do champion

They are subject to FBI background checks... psychological screening... substance abuse testing... intense employment scrutiny... and physical fitness testing.

Their training is intense, exacting, and continuous. They are expert marksmen, annually certified in an array of weaponry. In short, *they're professionals!*

Nuclear power plant security—it begins with highly qualified frontline professionals.

NEI

NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTITUTE

www.nei.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE NEW REPUBLIC
A Journal of Politics and the Arts

WASHINGTON, D.C.
APRIL 29, 2002
ISSUE 4,554

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
MARTIN PERETZ

EDITOR
PETER BEINART
Literary Editor
LEON WIESELTIER
Executive Editor
CHRISTOPHER ORR
Senior Editors
JONATHAN CHAIT, JONATHAN COHN, MICHELLE COTTLE, GREGG EASTERBROOK, JOHN B. JUDIS, LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN, ANDREW SULLIVAN, JAMES WOOD
Legal Affairs JEFFREY ROSEN
Managing Editor SARAH BLUSTAIN
Assistant Managing Editor AMANDA FAZZONE
Films: STANLEY KAUFFMANN
Theater: ROBERT BRUSTEIN
Poetry: GLYN MAXWELL
Art: JED PERL
Architecture: MARTIN FILLER
Dance: JENNIFER HOMANS
The New Republic Online
Assistant Editor CHRISTIANE CULHANE
Director of Business Operations ARI GERSEN
New Republic Books (BASIC BOOKS)
VANESSA MOBLEY
Contributing Editors
FOUAD AJAMI, AKHIL REED AMAR, PETER BERKOWITZ, PAUL BERMAN, JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN, NATHAN GLAZER, ANTHONY GRAFTON, DAVID GRANN, YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI, ANN HULBERT, TONY JUDT, ROBERT KAGAN, MICHAEL KINSLEY, CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER, JEREMY MCCARTER, JOHN MCWHORTER, SHERWIN B. NULAND, DAVID RIEFF, MAGGIE SCARF, LEE SIEGEL, RONALD STEEL, CASS R. SUNSTEIN, MARGARET TALBOT, E.V. THAW, HELEN VENDLER, MICHAEL WALZER, SEAN WILENTZ, ALAN WOLFE, ROBERT WRIGHT
Contributing Artists
JACK COUGHLIN, VINT LAWRENCE, DAVID SCHORR, TOM TOLES
Associate Editors
MICHAEL CROWLEY, FRANKLIN FOER, RYAN LIZZA, JASON ZENGERLE
Associate Literary Editor RUTH FRANKLIN
Art Direction JOE HEROUN, CHRISTINE CAR/H2C
Editorial-Corporate Coordinator
LAURA E. OBOLENSKY
Production and Information-Technology Director
BRUCE STEINKE
Production Manager HENRY RIGGS
Assistant Editors
NOAM SCHEIBER, SARAH WILDMAN, SACHA ZIMMERMAN
Assistant to the Editor ASHER PRICE
Assistant Literary Editor ERIN LEIB
Assistant Poetry Editor MELANIE REHAK
Reporter-Researchers
JULIE BOSMAN, REHAN SALAM

PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER
STEPHANIE SANDBERG
General Manager
ANNETTE POCICA
ADVERTISING, SALES AND MARKETING
Associate Publisher
ELISE ADDE
Director of Advertising, West
JOAN STAPLETON TOOLEY
Director of Advertising, New York
TIM WHITING
Publishing Consultant DAVID NUDO
Marketing Director SARA ZYSKOWSKI
Associate Advertising Manager MEREDITH COSSA
Marketing Assistant ETHAN FISCHER
FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION
Acting Controller MICHAEL SOUTHALL
Accounting Assistant VANESSA WILSON
Business Assistant SARA DEGRAEVE

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Chairman ROGER HERTOG
MARTIN PERETZ
MICHAEL STEINHARDT

4 **CORRESPONDENCE** Is Jonathan Chait biased? Is Bernard Goldberg? &c.

6 **PETER BEINART** TRB: COLOR WAR Race-baiting, Republican-style.

7 **THE EDITORS** THE PRAGMATIST Cornel West, and why Princeton can have him.

8 **NOTEBOOK** President Bush's conversations with himself, &c.

10 **RYAN LIZZA** WHITE HOUSE WATCH: FLIP SIDE Look who's talking about the war.

12 **SARAH WILDMAN** CABIN FEVER Why won't the Log Cabin Republicans criticize Bush?

13 **JANINE ZACHARIA** USER FRIENDLY Why Bush won't confront Syria.

14 **LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN** EYE CONTACT Get ready for U.S. monitors in Israel.

16 **JONATHAN CHAIT** WHAT'S IN A NAME? John McCain has a real shot at the White House in 2004. But not as a Republican or an Independent—as a Democrat.

20 **CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER** CROSSING LINES Four objections to research cloning, and why the fourth settles the issue.

24 **STANLEY KAUFFMANN** ON FILMS: PERIOD PIECES *The Cat's Meow* investigates the mysterious death of a movie producer in 1924; *Triumph of Love* offers a programmatic eighteenth-century love story.

25 **IAN BURUMA** THE ANTI-AMERICAN *Power Politics* by Arundhati Roy; *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* by Arundhati Roy

28 **IRVING HOWE** THE RIGHT TO WRITE BADLY On the origins and originality of Isaac Babel.

30 **EVAN RAIL** POEM *For the Cosmonauts*

33 **JUSTIN DRIVER** PILLAR OF IRE *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* by Jerry Gafio Watts

38 **MARTIN PERETZ** LONDON DIARIST: THE POET AND THE MURDERER

On the Cover : Illustration by TOMASZ WALENTA
On the Web : www.thenewrepublic.com

THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 226, Number 16, Issue 4,554, April 29, 2002. (Printed in the United States on April 17, 2002.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated March 4 & 11, April 1 & 8, July 8 & 15, August 5 & 12, August 19 & 26, September 9 & 16, December 2 & 9, and December 30, 2002 & January 6, 2003) at 1331 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. For advertising inquiries, please contact Meredith Cossa at (202) 508-4485 or our NY sales office at (212) 465-8447. Yearly subscriptions, $59.94; foreign, $99.94 (U.S. funds); Canada, $79.94 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $4.00 (includes postage & handling). **© 2002 by The New Republic, LLC.** **(ISSN 0028-6583). Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 628-9383. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, CD-ROM, issue, and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 37298, Boone, IA 50037-0298. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (e-mail address: tnr@aol.com). For subscription inquiries or problems call 1-800-827-1289 or visit our website at www.thenewrepublic.com.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poor showing

TO THE EDITORS:

Your March 18 editorial, "Cheap Shot," says: "Indeed, there are fewer American children in poverty today than at any time since 1978." I expect that what you meant to write was: "The percentage of American children in poverty today is lower than at any time since 1978." The absolute number of children in poverty has fallen from its peak in the early 1990s but is still well above the number in 1978. The Census Bureau estimates that in 1978 about 9.7 million children (15.7 percent of the total) lived in families with incomes below the poverty line. Both the rate and the absolute numbers rose fairly steadily until the peak year of 1993, when there were just under 15 million children in poverty (22 percent).

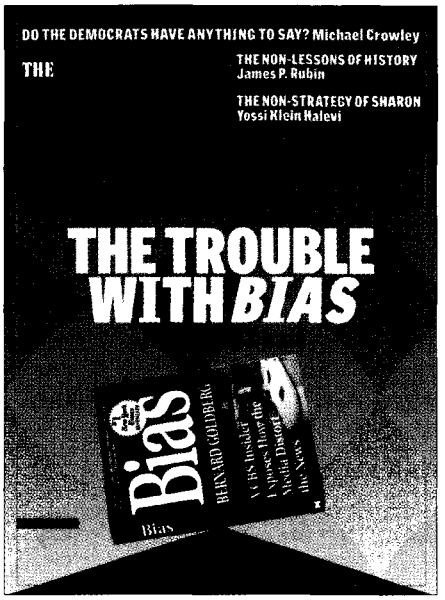
On March 7 the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Population Reference Bureau released a report titled "Children at Risk: State Trends 1990-2000" (available at *kidscount.org*), which compares data from the 1990 Census with newly released data from the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey, the largest household sample survey ever conducted in this country. It shows that among children in households (that is, excluding those in what the Bureau calls "group quarters"), 18 percent (11.2 million) had family incomes below the poverty line in 1989, and 17 percent (12.4 million) in 1999. The percentage of children living in poverty increased during the decade in 16 states and in the District of Columbia. That's not such a great showing for the longest sustained economic boom of modern times.

JOHN HAAGA
Director
Domestic Programs
Population Reference Bureau
Washington, D.C.

Press pass

TO THE EDITORS:

Swiss cheese doesn't have as many holes as Jonathan Chait's analysis of media bias in general and of my book *Bias* in particular ("Victim Politics," March 18). First of all, I say quite clearly in the book that media bias isn't so much about politics—about going easy on Democrats and tough on Republicans—but about how the big-time media see the big social issues of our time, everything from homelessness and race to gay rights and feminism. But Chait, like so many Washington journalists, can't get outside the Beltway. He says my analysis is "simplistic" and tries to prove it by telling us how the media cover—right!—politics. He goes on for thousands of words about



how the media have covered Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and Al Gore and Christine Todd Whitman. He even asks: "Do you think the media's coverage of the Whitewater scandal exhibited an anti-Clinton bias?" But that's myopic and refutes absolutely nothing about *Bias* since, as I say, I made quite clear that the nature of bias in the press and television is mainly not about politics. So, how does he analyze my take on the real issue: how the media covers homelessness and gay rights and feminism and race? He doesn't. He literally does not write a single word on any of those social issues. Chait also says the very notion of liberal bias is suspect (at best) because the media have given my book so much attention. Except he leaves out one very important point: In *Bias*, I am writing mainly about ABC, CBS, and NBC. And despite the fact that I've been on about 400 radio programs, about 40 cable TV shows, and despite the fact that *Bias* has been written about in China, Australia, Brazil, England, Canada, Russia, Israel, and a lot of other countries, three news organizations—and only three—will not have me on to talk about bias in the media: ABC, CBS, and NBC.

And Chait is not nearly as troubled as I am over the media's obsession with labeling conservatives far more than labeling liberals in our stories. Maybe he would be more concerned if we went back to the bad old days when journalists routinely labeled criminals by race only if they were black. Why? Because they saw blacks as out of the mainstream, different, inferior, and dangerous. And I think that's pretty much why we're always identifying conservatives and rarely identifying liberals.

Let's assume I'm dead wrong in my book, that there is no liberal bias in the big-time media. Then I can be easily dismissed. But what about the millions and millions of Americans—including many liberals—who think I'm right? What should we do with them? Are they all stupid? Or delusional? Are they under some kind of mass hypnosis, doing the dirty work of right-wing nuts who are pulling the strings? These strike me as important questions. Too bad they're rhetorical questions, but that's only because Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, and Peter Jennings don't want to answer them.

BERNARD GOLDBERG
Miami, Florida

JONATHAN CHAIT REPLIES:

My piece called Bernard Goldberg "comically bereft of self-awareness," and his letter is just more evidence. Let's take his complaints in order. Goldberg says his book doesn't claim that the media favor Democrats over Republicans. Really? Take just one example I cited in my article: Criticizing a CBS segment on Republican candidate Steve Forbes's flat tax, *Bias* charges: "There is absolutely no way—not one chance in a million—that [CBS reporter Eric] Engberg or Rather would have aired a flat-tax story with that same contemptuous tone if Teddy Kennedy or Hillary Clinton had come up with the idea." His complaint that my piece ignores social issues is even more bizarre—the heart of my article describes how the secular urban bias of the media affects its coverage of social issues, which in turn distorts its coverage of politics. And the idea that the networks have shunned his book out of ideological bias verges on megalomania. Yes, radio and cable chat shows discuss political books; network news programs usually don't. Moreover, I specifically discussed why the media's more frequent identification of "right-wing" rather than "left-wing" politicians reflects the rightward shift in American politics, which causes politicians to flaunt their conservatism and hide their liberalism. How my argument implies a desire to label criminals by race escapes me completely. As for Goldberg's defense that lots of people have bought his book—does it need to be said that stupid ideas can be popular?

TO THE EDITORS:

While Chait makes an interesting argument about the flat tax being fair game due to its lack of acceptance by major Republicans, he is incapable of seeing the real foundation of Goldberg's accusations. The insulting story that was aired by CBS never would have occurred if a Democrat

continued on page 37

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IF YOU'RE GOING TO ACT LOCALLY, YOU'LL NEED THE FACTS

ON EARTH DAY, April 22nd, the Pacific Research Institute will release the 7th edition of Steven Hayward's *Index of Leading Environmental Indicators*. The report shows that environmental quality in the U.S. has improved dramatically over the last 30 years, despite an increasing public perception that it's getting worse.

But don't take our word for it. Check it out for yourself. The Institute's website will feature the latest data on environmental quality for all 50 states and an exhaustive guide to online environmental resources. You can get the latest information on everything from air quality to biodiversity.

With all of the information that's available, there's no longer any excuse for being ignorant about the environment.

WWW.PACIFICRESEARCH.ORG

PRI

PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE
755 SANSOME STREET, SUITE 450
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111

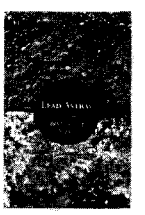
The 2002 *Index of Leading Environmental Indicators*, by Steven Hayward and Julie Majeres, is available for $12.95 plus shipping and handling. To order this study or other PRI publications, please call (800) 276-7600. It is also available free of charge on the Institute's website.

FREE MARKET ENVIRONMENTALISM
REVISED EDITION

by Terry L. Anderson & Donald R. Leal
Palgrave / Pacific Research Institute
ISBN: 0-312-23503-8
$18.95

"Anderson and Leal make a compelling and provocative case for free market environmentalism that deserves the attention of anyone seriously concerned about the future direction of environmental policy."

—WILLIAM H. MELLOR, III, INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE



LEAD ASTRAY:
INSIDE AN EPA SUPERFUND DISASTER

by Peter Samuel
Pacific Research Institute
ISBN: 0-936488-86-7
$24.95

EPA regulators are continuing to fight a war against lead poisoning that has already been won. Billions are being spent to clean up sites that are not dangerous, while doing little to remove the one source of lead that still poses a health risk to children – lead paint. Peter Samuel dissects the politics and bureaucracy from the science, and points the way to reforming the EPA's largest program.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Color War

IN 1996 BILL CLINTON nominated a Hispanic lawyer named Richard Paez to the U.S. Court of Appeals. But Senate Republicans wouldn't grant Paez a hearing. And so Democrats—seizing an opportunity to depict the GOP as hostile to a fast-growing minority—played the race card from the bottom of the deck. "This is complete discrimination," declared Democratic Senator Joseph Biden. "I want to say to Republicans," condescended New Mexico's Jeff Bingaman, "you don't have to be afraid.... They [Hispanics] are good lawyers and great judges." And Tom Daschle was most vociferous of all. "They [Republicans] don't want Richard Paez because he's Hispanic," charged the Senate Democratic leader before later exclaiming: "Viva Paez." Conservative commentators were enraged. Of course Republicans didn't oppose Paez because he's Hispanic; they opposed him because he was too liberal. Once again, the Democrats proved that racial demagoguery is their stock and trade.

The preceding paragraph is untrue; Paez's stalled nomination did not elicit the reaction described above. But it is untrue in a peculiar way—because its mirror image is occurring right now. President George W. Bush has nominated a Hispanic lawyer named Miguel Estrada to the U.S. Court of Appeals. Democrats have not granted him a hearing. And in response, last week *Republican* senators (specifically Rick Santorum, Pete Domenici, and Trent Lott) uttered the racially demagogic statements quoted above. And those conservative commentators who think crying racism demeans public debate? They haven't said a word. In fact, for almost two years now, they have stayed silent as the GOP has embraced exactly the kind of identity politics they supposedly despise.

To hear conservatives tell it, there are two basic problems with identity politics. The first is that it undermines meritocracy by making identity the criteria for advancement rather than ability. That's why the right flayed Clinton for requiring that his Cabinet "look like America." The qualification for high office, conservatives insisted, should be experience and brains, not whether you fill some racial or gender slot.

But Bush brazenly violated that principle even before taking office. According to conservative color-blind logic, the Bush campaign should have allocated speaking slots at the 2000 GOP convention according to merit; it should have featured the most experienced and thoughtful Republicans, regardless of race or gender. What happened was virtually the opposite: Bush's advisers trotted out an endless succession of black, Hispanic, and female unknowns—state representatives, lieutenant governors, and obscure members of Congress. Meanwhile, the people who really run the Republican Party remained out of sight—because they happen to be white men.

But few conservatives condemned the convention as an exercise in the "reverse racism" that they abhorred when practiced by Clinton. And in their acquiescence, they gave Bush a green light to apportion Cabinet positions based on race and ethnicity as well. When Bush put together his foreign policy team, conservatives proudly noted that in Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice he had found African Americans who merited their posts irrespective of their race. What they didn't mention was that in domestic policy, nothing could have been further from the truth. In his picks for secretary of education and secretary of housing and urban development, Bush picked up where he left off at the Philadelphia convention, passing over Republicans with national and state experience to choose an African American (Rod Paige) and a Hispanic (Mel Martinez) with no experience beyond the local level. Just as conservative anti-affirmative-action logic would have predicted, these underqualified nominees have underperformed in their jobs. (When Bush pushed his education package through Capitol Hill last year, one top congressional aide told *The New York Times* that Paige was "not part of the discussion.") Yet virtually no one on the right has uttered a word.

There is another problem with identity politics as well. According to conservatives, it doesn't only undermine meritocracy; it breeds a victim mentality that stifles honest debate. And since President Bush took office, Republicans have liberally indulged that tendency as well.

Estrada is the worst case. Whether or not Senate Democrats should be delaying his confirmation hearings, it has nothing to do with race. In fact, the Democrats have been explicit about their strategy regarding Bush's nominees. They're holding hearings on the moderate nominees first to encourage Bush to nominate more centrists in the future. And they're generally delaying votes on the most conservative ones. Since by all accounts Estrada is very conservative, his treatment (whether fair or not) is entirely color-blind. But that didn't stop Republican Senators Lott, Santorum, Domenici, and Orrin Hatch from calling the Democrats racist.

And it's not just Estrada. Time and again in the Bush era, conservatives have played victim politics in ways that would make Al Sharpton blush. When Democrats voted to prevent Mexican trucks from transporting goods throughout the United States, Trent Lott said it was because Democrats have "sort of an anti-Mexican or anti-Hispanic" attitude. When Democrats opposed John Ashcroft's nomination as attorney general, Republican Senator Phil Gramm said he was being "mocked for holding a deeply held faith"; the Heritage Foundation's Kay James, who testified on Ashcroft's behalf, said he was the victim of "religious profiling." Conservative victim politics reached their reducto ad absurdum this month during the fight over Charles Pickering's nomination to be an appeals court judge, when *National Review* claimed that Pickering "was a target of convenience, being a white male Republican from Mississippi of a certain age." In other words, Democrats were anti-Hispanic when they opposed Estrada, but anti-white when they opposed Pickering. Democrats have certainly indulged in their share of racial demagoguery over the years, but as far as I know, they have never managed to accuse the GOP of racism against whites and racism against minorities at the same time. In the annals of race-baiting, conservatives are breaking new ground.

Politically, the GOP's embrace of identity politics isn't hard to fathom. Given how few blacks and Hispanics support the GOP, the consequence of a principled Republican color-blindness would be overwhelmingly white conventions, overwhelmingly white Cabinets, and overwhelmingly white nominations to the federal bench. And in a country with an ever-diminishing percentage of whites, Republicans realize that's dangerous. Racial preferences and racial demagoguery may be smart ways to assemble a more diverse coalition. And my guess is that's why conservative commentators turn a blind eye—they've decided this is what Republicans need to do to compete. Fair enough, sometimes you make moral compromises in order to win. But if that's the case, let's hope that the next time the NAACP runs an ad implying that George W. Bush supports lynching, conservatives will have the decency to keep their outrage to themselves.

PETER BEINART

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Pragmatist

JUDGING FROM THE bottomless supply of eulogies available at your neighborhood Barnes & Noble—*Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline*, *The Last Intellectuals*, *Anxious Intellects*—it's always a good time to bemoan the decline of the public intellectual. But this week is a particularly apt moment for such reflections. Cornel West, one of the most persistent popularizers of the term "public intellectual," fled his post at Harvard's W. E. B. DuBois Institute for Princeton. The reason: comments made by Harvard President Lawrence Summers several months ago that West said "disrespected" him.

West's snit was remarkable not merely for making the front page of *The New York Times*; it was remarkable because the Summers slight was, well, slight. After initially suggesting that West produce some heavy-duty scholarship befitting his title of University Professor—Harvard only anoints 16 members of the faculty with this top honorific—Summers tried furiously to paper over his differences with West. He called the flap a "terrible misunderstanding." In one meeting last January, Summers told West, "I'm sorry"—three separate times. (West, by contrast, publicly chastised Summers as the "Ariel Sharon of American higher education.") But it is a shame Summers was so contrite. Because he was on to something. And that something goes beyond West to the idea of what it is, exactly, that constitutes a public intellectual.

Eulogists of the public intellectual worry that modern academics, locked inside their ivory towers, scratching ever deeper into their ever-smaller specialties, are pursuing knowledge at the cost of any public role. But whatever the value of scholarly engagement with the wider world, it has to rest, at base, on scholarship. And West's engagement, as Summers tried to politely point out, was based on anything but. At a glance, West's output appears prolific: In 12 years he's produced 16 books. The problem is the astonishing lack of original scholarship these books contain. Eight of the volumes are either co-written or are co-edited collections of other writers' essays. Three others are "conversations"—transcripts of love fests that West recorded with other presumed intellectuals such as *Tikkun*'s Michael Lerner and poet Bell Hooks. West seems also to have taken to heart the journalistic commandment to sell every article three times: An essay that appeared in the collection *Out There* (1990) reappeared in the collection *Keeping Faith* (1993), and then again in *The Cornel West Reader* (1999). And, of course, there's West's rap CD, recorded last year, which he modestly refers to as "a watershed moment in musical history." Indeed, since 1993 West has published just one volume of original material: a 159-page volume of musings on race called *Race Matters*.

But the problem isn't just the form of West's academic output; it's the content. West describes his intellectual project in a manner both self-deprecating and grandiose: "My work is a feeble attempt to understand and respond to the guttural cry that erupts from the depths of the soul of each of us. The existential quest for meaning and the political struggle for freedom sit at the center of my thought." So, in short, his subject is everything. Therefore it is also nothing. Over the past decade his writings have caromed from the politics of parenting to the future of progressivism to black-Jewish relations—all far afield of his onetime academic specialties in Christian thought and post-analytic philosophy. And as a result, West floods the library with vague assertions—damning the American "homespun brand of authoritarian democracy" or asserting that "Marxist thought becomes even more relevant after the collapse of communism"—but rarely bothers to present evidence or construct arguments that might support them.

If West is the model of a contemporary public intellectual, it's because more and more, public intellectuals are defined by their mastery of public relations. West has brilliantly transformed himself into a brand, a celebrity. His media-savvy political activism—getting arrested at the State Department, serving as a surrogate for Bill Bradley and Al Sharpton—keeps him in the news. And his talent for the outlandish (the rap album, the Saville Row threads, the old-time-religion oratorical style) makes for a perfect profile. His spat with Harvard, carefully managed by himself and his handlers, has just added to the spectacle.

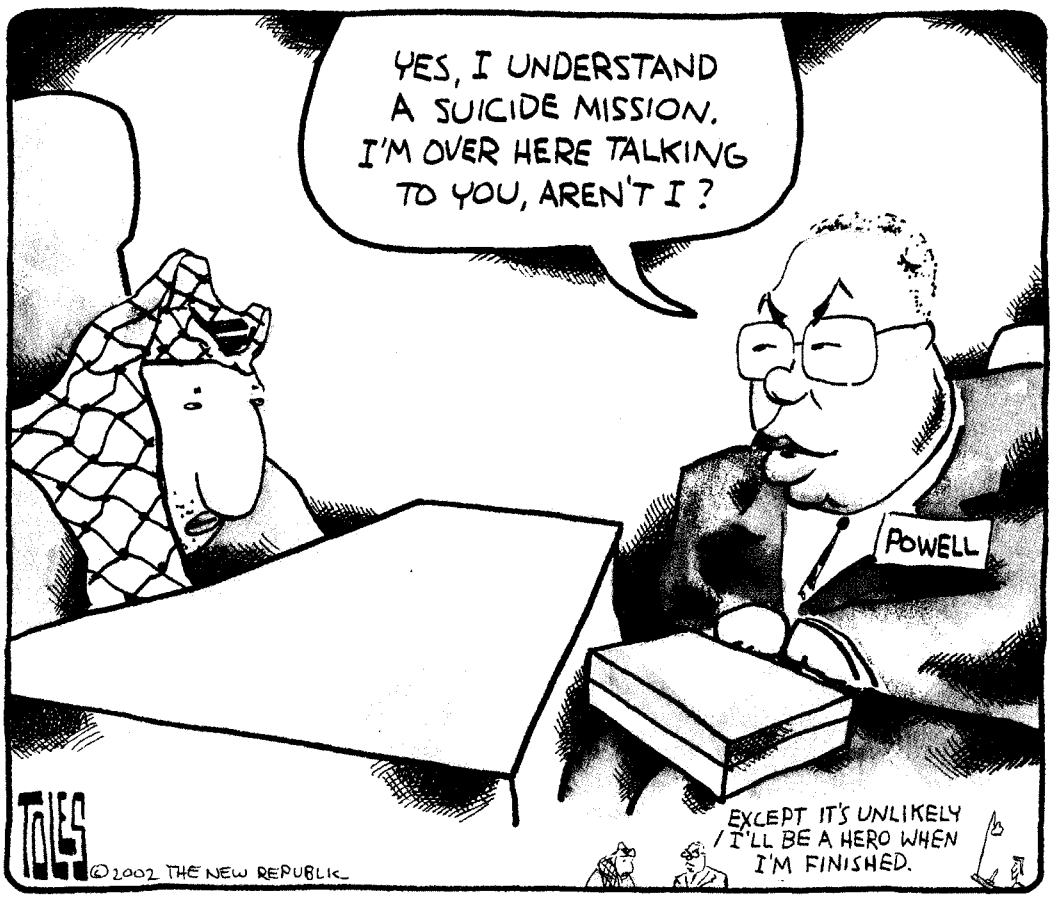
What's lost on this career track of posturing and self-aggrandizement, of course, is any learned and original and rigorous contribution to human knowledge or human thought. In West's case, the omission is particularly tragic. The fragile discipline of African American Studies badly needs high standards and serious scholarship. Instead, one of its preeminent practitioners offers tossed-off books, rap CDs, and shallow public disputes over the respect due to him. Congratulations, Princeton. You have your public intellectual. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HEARING VOICES: In August of last year, as it became clear his tax cut would force him to preside over the return of budget deficits, President Bush found a nifty answer for why he was not, in fact, violating his solemn campaign pledge not to dip into the Social Security surplus: "I've said that the only reason we should use Social Security funds is in case of an economic recession or war." The problem was, as we noted in this space at the time ("Fuzzy English," September 10, 2001), that while there were innumerable examples of Bush vowing not to touch Social Security revenues (the promise was, in fact, enshrined in the 2000 GOP platform), there was no prior record of Bush ever mentioning those exceptions—nor could the White House cite any instance when he had. But this week the Mystery of the Missing Lock Box Caveats was solved. In the course of promising at a Tuesday event that he would have the budget balanced by 2004, Bush reminisced: "I remember when I was campaigning, I said, 'Would you ever deficit spend?' And I said, 'Yes, only if there were a time of war, or recession, or a national emergency.'" So George W. Bush was, in fact, asked during the campaign about exceptions to his promise—by George W. Bush! And honest man that he is, he answered the question with exactly the exceptions he later revealed to the country. Only time will tell what other surprises the president's internal monologue holds in store.

A SEPARATE PEACE: Over the least few weeks you may have heard the plight of Adam Shapiro, the young Jewish-American engaged to a Palestinian woman, who has been living in Ramallah for the past six months decrying Israeli oppression and occupation—and even spending a night under siege with Yasir Arafat in his compound. Media coverage of Shapiro has been extremely sympathetic, focusing on his bravery and the cowardly death threats his Brooklyn parents have received as a result of their son's activism. So far, so good. But there seems to be some confusion over the exact nature of that activism. CBS, CNN, FOX NEWS, and NBC have all described Shapiro as a "peace activist"—with the clear implication that he is opposed to violence perpetrated both by Israelis and Palestinians. CNN's Judy Woodruff went so far as to gush, "And in the current environment there, every single voice for peace should give us cause for hope." And in a segment aired on NBC, Shapiro's brother Noah explained, "He does not support any type of violence. My brother is nonviolent to the extreme, he just wants peace in the region." Evidently, Noah—not to mention a variety of network producers—has not kept up with his brother's clippings, specifically an article he wrote with his fiancée for the *Palestine Chronicle* in January. Although the piece is largely an exhortation to nonviolent resistance on the part of Palestinians, it is quite explicit in arguing that nonviolent resistance is not enough: "[N]onviolent resistance can be used effectively, though not exclusively, in resisting and overcoming occupation," the authors write at one point. Lest anyone miss their point, they go on to state that "Palestinian resistance must take on a variety of characteristics—both violent and nonviolent. But most importantly it must develop a strategy involving both aspects." Finally, there is this depressing analogy: "[Nonviolent resistance] is no less noble than carrying out a suicide operation." Shapiro and his fiancée are indeed activists. Just not for peace.

FUZZIER AND FUZZIER: When the Bush administration squeezed what was really a several-trillion-dollar tax cut


YES, I UNDERSTAND A SUICIDE MISSION. I'M OVER HERE TALKING TO YOU, AREN'T I?
POWELL
EXCEPT IT'S UNLIKELY I'LL BE A HERO WHEN I'M FINISHED.
TOLES
©2002 THE NEW REPUBLIC

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into a ten-year, $1.35 trillion package last year, politicians and commentators on both sides of the aisle saw the move as a temporary marketing ploy that would be discarded at the earliest opportunity. So it's no surprise that the White House used last Monday, the day millions of Americans were scrambling to file their tax returns, to push for extending the cuts indefinitely. "It's going to be hard to plan your future if you think all of a sudden these things get kicked in full time and then go away," the president told workers at a General Mills plant in Iowa on Monday. "They need to make these tax cuts permanent." It's not an unreasonable argument. After all, if you believe, as most economists do, that people tend to save rather than spend temporary increases in income, then failing to make the tax cut permanent could in principle undermine its impact on the economy. But as Bush tried to elaborate on his argument, he turned it into nonsense. The tax cut, he claimed, was "one of the reasons we're seeing encouraging signs in the economy." But if expectations that the tax cut will only be temporary are such a problem, how can it be having such a beneficial effect on the economy? And if, on the other hand, people are already out there spending their tax cuts—regardless of whether they get extended beyond 2010—why rush to make them permanent? In that case, the primary effect of making the tax cuts permanent would simply be to drain the federal budget of what Democrats on the House Budget Committee say will be roughly $4 trillion—at precisely the time the baby-boomers begin straining Social Security and Medicare. "Sometimes in Washington, it's all theory," Bush warned the audience in Iowa. And sometimes it's no theory at all.

THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLE OF BUSHISM?: "Legitimacy is something that is conferred not just by a majority of the voters..."—an "administration official," discussing the White House's early enthusiasm for the overthrow of democratically elected Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, *The New York Times*, April 16

DEPARTMENT OF POTS & KETTLES: "Where we do get into challenges sometimes ... we have the interlopers.... [Y]ou might have correspondents who have not covered military affairs before, who don't really understand what it is they're dealing with."—Pentagon Spokeswoman Victoria (Torie) Clarke, FOX NEWS, April 4

"Torie Clarke, the Pentagon's chief spokeswoman, freely admits that her previous knowledge of the military was 'next to nothing.' "—*The Washington Post*, October 15, 2001

OLDIE, BUT GOODIE: "[Ted] Kennedy charged yesterday that the administration 'is waiting to spring a November surprise—a secret post-election plan to slash Social Security and tarnish the golden years of the elderly.' "—*The Washington Post*, October 31, 1982

"And so, we are going to do everything in our power to upset their plan—their secret plan—to pass the privatization of Social Security after the election."—Dick Gephardt, March 22, 2002

GOOD FELLOWS: A rigorous scientific study of this year's Guggenheim Fellowships, which were announced last week, leads to an incontrovertible conclusion: Writing for this magazine may not be all it takes to win these coveted awards, but it sure helps. We are delighted to congratulate Omer Bartov, David A. Bell, Paul Berman, Nicholas Howe, Claire Messud, and Christopher S. Wood. ■

Theraputic Cloning Debate
WE RESOLVED THE SANCTITY OF LIFE QUESTION.
YOU DIDN'T MAKE THE CUT.
WAITING ROOM
PARKINSON'S PATIENT
TOLES ©2002 THE NEW REPUBLIC
YOU DID RECEIVE AN HONORABLE MENTION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

White House Watch

Flip Side

By Ryan Lizza

It is the most tired political cliché since 9/11: To challenge President Bush, Democrats—insecure about foreign policy in general and terrified of appearing unpatriotic—must unquestioningly applaud Bush's handling of the war and turn every conversation back to domestic issues. But as of last week's Florida state Democratic convention in Orlando, the cliché is no longer true. It's no longer Democrats who are trying to change the subject back to small-bore domestic issues; it's Bush. And it's no longer Democrats who are ducking questions about the war; it's Bush. Democrats, who have tried and failed to gain political traction against the president on every domestic issue from Enron to ANWR, are suddenly finding Bush vulnerable on foreign policy. The current tapering off of Bush's job-approval rating and the simultaneous uptick in the Democrats' numbers (two recent polls show the so-called "generic ballot" again favors Democrats over Republicans) is occurring as White House opponents pummel Bush over his handling of the Middle East and of the war on terrorism. "It's a sign," says one Senate Democratic aide, "that a lot of sharp, savvy political minds are reaching the same conclusion: As soon as it gets any more nuanced than 'good versus evil,' [Bush] gets into trouble.... Up until the last ten days, the CW was holding that you agree with him on the war and draw lines on domestic policy." For the moment at least, that logic has been reversed.

Most of Bush's public events since Congress returned from its Easter recess have tried to jump-start his congressional agenda. But his calls on the Senate to confirm his judges, pass his energy plan, and give him fast-track trading authority have all been overshadowed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One White House aide, speaking of the nonstop coverage of the Middle East and the administration's inability to change the subject, plaintively asked at the end of last week, "When is this going to end?"

Not anytime soon, if the Democrats have anything to say about it. The case they are now making against the Bush Doctrine is two-fold. From the right, Democrats claim Bush is violating his own doctrine. From the left, they complain the doctrine is too narrow. In Orlando, Senator Joe Lieberman expressed the view from the right most eloquently (at least on paper; his delivery is still more senatorial than presidential), arguing that by "publicly and persistently pressur[ing] Israel not to do exactly what we have rightly done to fight the terrorists who struck us on September eleventh," Bush has "muddled our moral clarity," and therefore "risks losing the moral high ground and compromising our own war on terrorism." Senator John Kerry made the same case when he announced, "If the United States has a right to respond in Afghanistan to suicide attackers in New York City—and we do—then Israel has a right to respond to suicide bombers in the West Bank."

But in Florida, Lieberman and Kerry also hinted at another criticism of the Bush Doctrine gaining salience in Democratic circles: a critique from the interventionist left. Lieberman said the United States should use its power to "bring progress to some of the most seemingly hopeless conflicts in the world," implying that Bush hasn't done so. Kerry scolded Bush for ignoring the Middle East conflict for so many months: "A great nation like ours should never be dragged kicking and resisting—and should not have been pressured—to the task of making peace." Similarly, Senators Kerry, John Edwards, and Joe Biden, who is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, have started making hay over Bush's unwillingness to expand Afghanistan's international peacekeeping force beyond Kabul.

As for Al Gore, ironically, at the moment almost every leading Democrat is criticizing Bush's foreign policy—and despite the advice of some advisers—he declined to comment on the war on terrorism in his speech. But he did two months ago in New York. The gist of those remarks was similar to the liberal interventionist line now gaining wider currency. "There is another axis of evil in the world," Gore said, "poverty and ignorance; disease and environmental disorder; corruption and political oppression. We may well put down terror in its present manifestations. But if we do not attend to the larger fundamentals as well, then the ground is fertile and has been seeded for the next generation of those born to hate the United States of America."

Some may dismiss Gore's and other Democrats' fixation on nation-building, but even conservatives can't be too upset about the Democrats' critique of the Bush Doctrine. Sure, they are scoring political points against the president, but they are being responsible about it. Even at a conclave of left-wing party activists in Florida (according to *The Hartford Courant*, one woman at the back of the crowd held up a sign protesting U.S. military action around the world) no Democratic speaker gave in to the anti-war impulses still extant in the party's base.

The same was true Monday at the Capitol, when the Democratic opportunities—and Republican dangers—present in a debate over foreign policy came into sharpest relief. Before tens of thousands of demonstrators at the pro-Israel rally, one of the architects of the Democrats' post-9/11 political strategy, Dick Gephardt, gave a fiery speech declaring, "Chairman Arafat has not yet demonstrated a true commitment to peace, and the consequences have been devastating for Israelis and Palestinians alike." Tom Daschle's velvet-fisted consigliere, Nevada Senator Harry Reid, also took a veiled swipe at Bush's policy: "We can't expect Israel to stand idle while its citizens are being slaughtered." In both cases, the crowd cheered. Meanwhile, at the same rally, the most hawkish member of the Bush administration, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, was actually booed and heckled. And where was the president on Monday? In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, hosting a Republican fund-raiser and talking about last year's tax cut. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Defense Mathematics

Bruce Berkowitz is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution.

Defense policy is admittedly a complex topic. To understand the issue, it helps to keep five numbers in mind.

The first number is $750 billion. That's what all the world's nations combined spend on defense, according to the CIA *World Factbook*. It has been declining most years—but slowly—since the end of the cold war.

The second number is 3.2 percent. That's the part of the U.S. gross national product that our country spends on defense. It has been slowly declining, too, for the past decade. The percentage is small by historic standards. During the cold war it ranged from two to four times greater. It means we can maintain our current defense budgets with little or no effect on the U.S. economy. We're running at a comfortable pace.

The third number is $379 billion—the defense budget requested by the Bush administration for fiscal year 2003. It includes a $10 billion contingency fund to fight terrorism. What's interesting about this number is that **the United States now spends as much on defense as everyone else in the world combined.**

Rarely in history has a single country been so dominant. During the cold war, pundits argued over whether the Soviet Union or the United States was ahead in the so-called arms race. Today there isn't even a race. It means that the United States can do things no one else can—such as transport thousands of troops halfway around the world, build aircraft invisible to radar, and design bombs to land within a few feet of their target.

The fourth number is 17.6. That is the rate at which China increased its defense spending this year. It just reminds us that, despite America's predominance, there are countries willing to make the investment to challenge us at least in some regions.

The fifth number is 3,061—the number of people killed at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Somerset County, Pennsylvania, on September 11. This number reminds us that, though the United States is supreme in traditional military capabilities, hostile countries and terrorist groups can still strike directly at America from halfway around the world with devastating results.

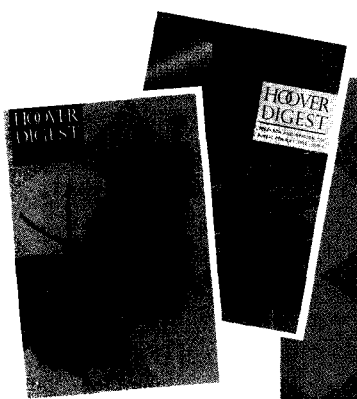
These numbers are important, but the biggest issues facing U.S. defense policy today are not so much "how much" as they are "how"—that is how we select, organize, train, plan, and deploy our forces. **We need to proceed aggressively on military transformation to create the flexible, agile, and rapid-response military force required to counter the asymmetric threats we now face.**

Furthermore, organization is extremely important. The armed services, state governments, and even the private sector must all learn to work together in new ways. Today, threats can come from many different sources, and even seemingly weak adversaries can be dangerous.

Most of all, in the "post-post–cold war" era, the United States needs leaders who can point out threats and head them off early, Leadership and decisiveness are critical in using our powerful—but finite—military forces effectively.

— Bruce Berkowitz

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



Interested in more commentary on public policy?

Visit us on-line at **www.hoover.org** *or contact us to receive a complimentary copy of the 200-page, award-winning* **Hoover Digest.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Log Cabin Republicans collapse.

Cabin Fever

By Sarah Wildman

Last month President Bush's appointees attended their first meeting of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV and AIDS. New Co-Chairs Tom Coburn, a former Oklahoma representative, and Louis Sullivan, Bush I's secretary of Health and Human Services, bring the kind of experience you'd expect would make gay organizations fume. Three years ago Coburn promised the Family Research Council that "[n]o one stands harder against homosexuality than I do." As a member of the House of Representatives, he dismissed condoms as a means to fight AIDS, noting, "they break, they slip," and proposed, instead, abstinence until marriage—which wouldn't much benefit the gay community, since Coburn opposes gay marriage. Sullivan is not much better, having infamously helped bury a 1989 report on suicide among gay teens while serving in Poppy's Cabinet.

But the Log Cabin Republicans (LCR), the nation's best-known gay GOP group, wasn't outraged at all. In fact, its reaction was downright chipper. In a press release issued after Coburn's and Sullivan's appointments, LCR praised the administration for bringing "substantial AIDS policy experience to [the] council."

Cheering blatantly anti-gay policies and appointees has become LCR's modus operandi. When the press reported a White House deal to allow the Salvation Army to discriminate against gays and still compete for anti-poverty funds, LCR put out a press release parroting the administration's dubious defense. After the Bush administration signaled its opposition to the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), the executive director of LCR—which spent eight years helping draft the legislation—backed away from their long-held position, saying that since "only 15 percent of Americans" claim they would discriminate against a gay man or lesbian in their employ, ENDA is no longer crucial. And when Bush nominated John Ashcroft, one of the Senate's most consistently anti-gay members, to be attorney general, LCR supported the appointment.

Which may be why LCR's PAC contributions are, as former LCR board member Carl Schmid put it, "dismal." According to recently released numbers for the 2002 election cycle, Log Cabin has given a paltry $1,500 to House Republicans and $250 to one GOP senator. The left-leaning gay advocacy group Human Rights Campaign (HRC), by contrast, has allocated $81,000 to House Republicans and $7,500 to GOP senators, even though only a small fraction of their overall giving goes to Republicans. "[Log Cabin is] not effective in lobbying for a whole variety of issues—on ENDA, on AIDS, ... on adoption, on the Boy Scouts," sighs Schmid, who bolted LCR for the HRC. "They just talk. And issue press releases." In other words, the Log Cabin Republicans are becoming irrelevant. And they deserve to be.

Once upon a time, LCR served as a useful gadfly. In 1992, when Pat Buchanan and the Christian right took over the Republican National Convention in Houston, LCR publicly distanced itself from Bush père. "We won't stand by," said Executive Director Rich Tafel when LCR announced that it wouldn't endorse the Bush/Quayle ticket, "and see gay people used as a scapegoat in this campaign." In 1995, when Bob Dole returned the group's $1,000 donation (and then said he regretted doing so), LCR thrust the rejection of gay Republicans into full public view. And on Capitol Hill, LCR helped secure Republican votes for the Ryan White CARE Act, which provided grants for battling HIV and AIDS. In 1996 all but four House Republicans supported the measure's reauthorization.

During Campaign 2000, LCR continued making useful trouble—throwing early support and money to John McCain after Bush, in a bumbling interview with NBC's Tim Russert, said he opposed gay adoption and would "probably not" meet with Log Cabin "because it creates a huge political scene." It was another misstep for a candidate with a terrible record on gay issues—as governor, Bush publicly supported Texas's anti-sodomy laws and refused to include gays in Texas hate-crime legislation. Tafel responded by writing a $1,000 personal check to the McCain campaign. Log Cabin followed that up with $20,000 worth of radio ads in crucial Super Tuesday states New York, California, and Massachusetts, blasting Bush for refusing to sit down with Log Cabin; visiting Bob Jones University; and "align[ing] himself with Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell."

The Bush campaign did not take kindly to the attacks. And so in April 2000, when Bush's advisers realized he needed to sit down with some gay men and lesbians, they pointedly passed over Log Cabin and instead gathered an unaffiliated group of gay Republicans. From that meeting, put together with the help of some disaffected Log Cabin members and longtime Bush family friend Charles Francis, the Republican Unity Coalition (RUC) was born, with Francis at its head.

Since then, the RUC has been steadily encroaching on LCR's turf, raising loads of money and winning attention among GOP higher-ups. The RUC didn't endorse Ashcroft, but, then, it doesn't endorse much; it virtually avoids policy altogether. As Francis puts it in his genial Southern drawl, "We will support Republican candidates that believe in the big tent. They can vote on many different issues in many different ways—as long as they [support the idea of a] big tent and want the party to ... [make] sexual orientation a non-issue for the Republican party."

Given the RUC's vacuity, there's still an opening for a Republican group that stands for something. And Log Cabin might have been it. After all, backing McCain wouldn't have been a bad strategy had LCR been willing to embrace its outsider role and take on Bush's lousy record on gay rights. But instead, as Bush went around LCR, it backtracked, handing him its endorsement. And they've continued sucking up since he took office—most amazingly by supporting the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nomination of Ashcroft, who, as a senator, earned a consistent "0" rating from the HRC and called homosexuality a "sin." Log Cabin representative Kevin Ivers spins it differently. "We judge what we do on whether we move the ball forward for gay people everywhere," he says, noting that LCR exacted statements of support from Ashcroft during his nomination process. But other gay Republicans remain unimpressed. "Ever since [Austin]," says one prominent gay Republican who met with Bush in April 2000, "Log Cabin has been trying to curry favor [with the administration], which has caused them to have to compromise their position."

The result has been the worst of all worlds. The Bushies, characteristically obsessive about loyalty, don't seem to care about Log Cabin's fawning press releases—and have tacitly encouraged the RUC in its efforts to supplant it. But in its failed efforts to regain influence, LCR has compromised its principles, making it irrelevant to gay Republicans who want a clear pro-gay-rights vision for the GOP.

Those gay Republicans may, however, have another option. Just as LCR has been failing to uphold the Republican gay rights banner, the HRC has been moving away from its strict alignment with the Democratic Party. In fact, the RUC and HRC are holding a joint fund-raiser for three beleaguered House Republicans—Mark Steven Kirk of Illinois, Rob Simmons of Connecticut, and Mike Ferguson of New Jersey—next week. And the HRC has begun adding big-name gay GOPers like ex-Wisconsin Representative Steve Gunderson and ex-FEC Chairman Trevor Potter to its board. Which means that Republicans who believe in equal treatment for gays and lesbians may have a principled and effective advocate after all—it just won't bear the name Log Cabin. ■

Syria gets lucky.

User Friendly

By JANINE ZACHARIA

THE RECENT UPSURGE in violence against Israel—both from Palestinian suicide bombers in the West Bank and Hezbollah rockets in southern Lebanon—may have temporarily quieted the Bush administration's rhetorical offensive against Iraq. But it has prompted a torrent of tough talk against a previously neglected Arab dictatorship: Syria. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld opened a routine Pentagon briefing on April 1 by unexpectedly lumping Damascus in with Baghdad and Tehran, accusing all three of "inspiring and financing a culture of political murder and suicide bombing." And President George W. Bush, in a news conference three days later, volunteered that it was time for Syria to "decide which side of the war on terror" it was on.

Is Syria about to become a new point on Bush's axis of evil? Don't get your hopes up. Hawks like Rumsfeld, whose beef with Syria dates back to the 1980s when then-President Hafez al-Assad rebuffed him as a U.S. mediator, may want a tougher approach. Hard-liners on Capitol Hill are pushing for a full trade embargo; a ban on U.S. investment; or even freezing Syrian assets in the United States should Syria continue to flout the president. But too many Damascophiles are whispering in the president's ear. Among the whisperers are Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director George Tenet, former Secretary of State James Baker, and Edward Djerejian, the former ambassador to Syria who—with the State Department's blessing—is organizing a conference of American and Syrian officials and professionals next month. The pro-engagement crowd insists that Washington needs President Bashar al-Assad's help in the war on terror, the war on Saddam Hussein, and, eventually, peace with Israel. And its influence is such that when Vice President Dick Cheney left off Syria and Lebanon from his tour of Arab capitals last month, he felt compelled to make up for the snub when he subsequently called Assad to pressure him on Hezbollah. Secretary of State Colin Powell didn't commit the same mistake—including Damascus in his Middle Eastern itinerary last week. As one Washington observer of U.S.-Syria relations puts it, "The fact that Cheney called, and now Powell visited, shows it's the same old game between Syria and Washington."

The first reason dates back to September 11. The Bush team, according to insiders, was delighted with Syria's initial response to the terrorist attacks. Assad sent Bush a letter of support that included a "strong denunciation of the series of criminal attacks which astonished the world by their cruelty." He proposed that together the United States and Syria "establish sound bases of worldwide cooperation ... to uproot terrorism in all its forms." It was, needless to say, an odd gesture from a country the United States lists as a state sponsor of terrorism. But Bushies say that while Assad clearly backs Hezbollah and various Palestinian terrorist organizations, his minority Alawite regime considers Sunni fundamentalism a threat. And that has led him to provide the United States with reams of intelligence about Al Qaeda. According to intelligence sources, Syria received a CIA delegation in the wake of September 11 and gave it information that "helped save American lives."

The second reason the United States is unlikely to transform its anti-Syria talk into action is Saddam. Washington's coaxing of Syria into the 1991 effort to liberate Kuwait gave the United States valuable political cover in the Arab world. The current Bush administration wants that same cover this time around. But Syria is proving more reluctant; Assad has no love for Saddam, but his regime enjoys a steady flow of cheap oil from Baghdad. "Saddam in the cage is better than an unknown new regime," says one Syria expert. "They need to hear from Washington what is in it for them to help him get ousted." Administration officials still hope to get Assad on board—perhaps by assuring him some influence over a post-Saddam government—and they fear that if they confront him over other issues, they will lose their chance.

Lastly, Washington doesn't want to close the door on a prospective Israeli-Syrian rapprochement. The prospect will remain remote as long as the Israeli-Palestinian fighting

JANINE ZACHARIA is Washington correspondent for *The Jerusalem Post*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rages, of course. But the United States worries that picking a fight with Damascus would further Israel's isolation. "It would not be in our interest, nor in the Israelis' interests, for us to have a huge rupture," says one former senior defense official. Indeed, Ariel Sharon could at some point abandon the Palestinian track and seek peace in the North. It would not be the first time. "The elusive quest for a deal on the Golan which was sought by [Israeli Prime Ministers] Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, and even Bibi Netanyahu, so ardently meant that Syria had to be separated from the other 'pariahs' and given a unique status," says one former senior White House official who fashioned policy toward Syria. "As long as a government in Jerusalem was interested in Assad as a peace partner, there would be little interest in Washington in being more zealous than Israel in trying to take on the Syrians."

ALL OF THESE concerns have led the United States to ignore an array of bad Syrian behavior. On terrorism, it has permitted Damascus to heat up the Israeli-Lebanese border periodically without any real consequences, despite Israel's U.N.-certified pullout from south Lebanon in May 2000. While Syria's sheltering of Iranian-funded terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad has kept it on the State Department's state sponsors of terrorism list, the Bush administration has done little to give its ritual condemnations teeth. And it has proved powerless to stop Iranian flights full of weaponry from landing in Damascus.

What's more, while U.S. officials periodically acknowledge Syria's drive to develop weapons of mass destruction, they just as frequently play it down. Syria has hundreds of scuds within striking range of Israel; and as senior CIA official Robert Walpole told a Senate subcommittee in March, Damascus may be pursuing longer-range ballistic missile capability equivalent to North Korea's Nodong missile—a range that would give Syria the ability to hit Europe. Syria has developed chemical warheads for its scuds and has an offensive biological weapons program, according to Walpole. But when asked on Capitol Hill in February why Syria was not grouped with the axis of evil, Powell said, "They are developing weapons, but not as aggressively or with the same kind of commitment [as] the ones we did label." A more honest answer might have been that the Bush administration couldn't draw up a list of bad guys that was all Muslim, so they replaced Syria with North Korea, although Pyongyang's ties to international terrorism are far more remote. As one senior administration official acknowledges, "Syria is catching a lucky break both in terms of the Middle East peace process and weapons of mass destruction."

But Damascus has probably gotten its biggest pass on its occupation of Lebanon. While Syria sits on the U.N. Security Council—sponsoring resolutions that undermine American peace efforts—and blasts Israel for its continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, no official in Washington dares speak out against Damascus's roughly 25,000 troops in Lebanon, who should have been redeployed as part of the 1989 Taif accord that ended the Lebanese civil war. That's because when Syria agreed to join the Gulf war and later to participate in the Madrid peace conference, the United States tacitly agreed to overlook Damascus's grip on its weak neighbor. The deal has proved resilient, even though a growing number of Lebanese oppose Syria's presence, and even though Syria prevents the Lebanese army from deploying to the border with Israel and cracking down on Hezbollah. Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri considers Hezbollah a destabilizing force that threatens his efforts to rebuild the Lebanese economy, but he's powerless to rein it in.

The most recent example of Syrian impudence has been its continued import of between 150,000 and 200,000 barrels of oil per day from Iraq outside the parameters of the U.N. oil-for-food program. This despite Assad's much heralded promise to cease the illegal flow when Powell visited Damascus in February 2001. The United States hoped Syria would make good on its promise because of its desire to win the Bush administration's acquiescence in its bid to join the U.N. Security Council. But in reality, Syria got the seat without a whisper of protest from Washington, and the only thing Assad has done with Syria's illegal pipeline in return is to crank up the spigots. Moreover, while in his September letter to Bush, Assad said he would help the United States uproot terrorism in all its forms, he doesn't believe Hamas and Hezbollah fall under that definition. And to drive home the point, nine days after Assad sent his condolence letter to Bush, state-run Radio Damascus urged the United States to add Israel to the list of state sponsors of terrorism and accused Jerusalem of being behind the September 11 attacks.

The year before he became director of policy planning at the State Department, Richard Haass wrote that Syria "should expect continued economic penalties and political isolation at the official level" if an Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon resulted in increased Hezbollah attacks. The attacks have materialized, but the penalties have not. Cheney is calling Damascus. Bush is writing. Powell is stopping in for a chat. "Assad sees the Americans as coming no matter what," says one Israeli official. And sadly, he's probably right. ■

The plan for U.S. monitors in Israel.

Eye Contact

By LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

LAST MONTH Secretary of State Thomas Friedman unveiled the sequel to his Saudi peace plan: the deployment of American troops to the Holy Land. U.S. soldiers, wrote *The New York Times* columnist, should, among other things, safeguard the "most sensitive area of Jerusalem, the Temple Mount," along with Israel's "borders and those of the Palestinian state." And while Friedman's latest proposal may not have created quite the furor of his earlier white paper, it did prompt a chorus of hallelujahs from Washington's foreign

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

policy establishment. Senator Dianne Feinstein has suggested five years as the appropriate duration for a U.S. peacekeeping mission. Her colleague Richard Lugar recommends that NATO and Arab countries participate as well, while former Clinton Middle East point man Martin Indyk advises that U.S. troops preside over a trusteeship in the West Bank.

No one, alas, bothered to ask the Bush team what it thought of the idea. The answer is not much. White House officials claim to have no intention of dispatching troops to police a cease-fire accord, and Ariel Sharon has made it clear he has no intention of accepting them. For his part, Donald Rumsfeld, who believes even the long-standing presence of an American battalion in the Sinai Peninsula serves little purpose, has spent the past year trying to *extricate* U.S. forces from the region. Hence, when Foggy Bottom Special Envoy Anthony Zinni floated the idea of deploying U.S. peacekeepers to Israel at meetings with members of Congress three weeks ago, Rumsfeld phoned Colin Powell and exacted a pledge from the secretary of state that the only idea being entertained was the dispatch of a small group of civilian monitors.

That idea, however, is being more than entertained. Lost in the hypothetical debate over whether to send U.S. soldiers into the Israeli-Palestinian breach is the fact that the administration has already settled on a plan to send U.S. diplomats into it. The next stage of American intervention in the conflict isn't armed peacekeepers. It's observers in pinstripes.

THE IDEA IS nothing new. Administration officials have been debating monitoring proposals since last spring, when the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) drafted a memo linking observers to the administration's embrace of the Mitchell peace plan, which recommends that monitors oversee any cease-fire agreement. Last June, Powell insisted in a joint press conference with Yasir Arafat that "[t]here will be a need for monitors and observers." By the end of the day Powell—under pressure from Israel and the White House—had retracted the statement. Nonetheless, on his return to Washington, the secretary of state directed his staff to draw up a detailed proposal for exactly the sort of mission he had just repudiated. And over the next few weeks a long line of U.S. diplomats, including Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Satterfield, shuttled between Jerusalem and Washington to devise a monitoring plan palatable to the Israelis. But in the face of escalating Palestinian violence, Sharon refused to commit. The violence and the administration's own ambivalence eventually diminished Powell's enthusiasm too. And by last August the Bush team was pressuring America's allies to quiet the talk of monitors, with Powell himself declaring that observers were "not a way to move forward" in the midst of conflict.

The idea lay dormant for half a year. But last month, just before Zinni's third trip to Israel—which coincided with Vice President Dick Cheney's tour of the Middle East to drum up support for a U.S. attack on Iraq—the administration rediscovered it. "NEA and [Assistant Secretary of State William] Burns had been looking for an excuse to propose monitors again," says a senior administration official, "and Cheney's trip was the excuse that worked." At a principals' meeting on the eve of Zinni's departure for Israel, the White House signed off on reviving the monitoring proposal. This the State Department proceeded to do loudly and ostentatiously—hinting that monitors might even accompany Zinni on his trip (they didn't); trumpeting Shimon Peres's support for the idea; and advertising details of the plan, such as the stationing of monitors in Palestinian offices and jails, which would benefit Israel. And when Zinni and State Department adviser Aaron Miller met with their Israeli counterparts in March, monitors were a centerpiece of their discussions.

The Passover bombing in Netanya, and the Israeli invasion it triggered, derailed the plan once more. But only temporarily. That's because Israel's incursion elicited a diplomatic howl from the Saudis, Jordanians, and Egyptians (according to one diplomat, the latter even flirted with recalling their ambassador from Washington). And what better way to quiet their protests than to proceed with a blueprint that satisfied the decades-long Arab aim of "internationalizing" the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Indeed, far from being placated by Powell's mission to the region, Arab leaders told the administration they wouldn't support it unless the secretary of state brought with him a plan for monitors—a request that Powell reaffirmed at every stop on last week's swing through the region.

At Powell's most important stop, however, the idea ran into resistance. Not, oddly enough, from Sharon—who under U.S. pressure officially agreed two weeks ago to a force consisting "of only Americans, and only monitors"—but from the Palestinians, who, according to administration officials, favor a force that would step in to prevent (Israeli) cease-fire violations and monitor roadblocks, as opposed to merely documenting incidents from a remote office, which Israel favors. Sharon's preference seems to have prevailed. "We might draw from our diplomatic presence or send someone from State or other agencies that could monitor activity and performance," Powell said last week. "But this is not an interim force to keep people from shooting each other." The proposed force is, indeed, strikingly modest: approximately two dozen observers drawn from the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency.

STILL, ISRAELI AND U.S. officials both have their reservations. America's primary concern is the observers' safety. Their mission, predicts one State Department official, would be loosely modeled on the Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group, which refereed from a distance as Israel and Hezbollah traded fire across the border during the late 1990s. Pentagon officials, however, say the Lebanese model may be too optimistic. They worry the monitors might instead follow the lead of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH). Assembled in 1994, the mostly Scandinavian TIPH monitors were meant "to provide a feeling of security" in Hebron. Yet they have done little to deter the Israelis—who deride them as "ice-cream men" (the observers dress in white)—and even less to deter the Palestinians, who have lately taken to killing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them. Another American concern derives from the mission's purpose—or, more specifically, the fear that there isn't one. "What's the point?" asks a skeptical member of the Bush team. "To take notes, to watch, or just to do something?"

For their part, Israeli officials understand the point all too well, which they claim to be less technical than political. Sharon's government may have signed off on the monitoring proposal, but it also harbors no illusions that the plan represents anything but a sop to the Arabs. According to one Sharon adviser, the very essence of effective cease-fire monitoring is studious neutrality—a quality that, whatever U.S. policymakers may say, does not and should not characterize America's close relationship with its longtime ally. Israeli officials also fear that, with the White House keen to garner Arab support for an attack against Iraq, the threshold for determining cease-fire violations could easily bend along with America's interests. It's happened before. When, for example, Egypt violated a U.S.-sponsored cease-fire agreement by moving missiles to the Suez Canal in 1970, America's stake in the accord prompted the Nixon administration to feign ignorance about the weapons, which were subsequently used against Israel.

But the biggest worry of Israeli officials is that even if America's sympathies remain with the Jewish state, the structure of the conflict may compel observers to blow the whistle on them and not the Palestinians. As Peres put it last year, "[S]ince the Palestinians are carrying out terrorist attacks via underground operations, their activity, by definition, would not be witnessed by observers while the Israeli Army's activity would be observed—thus leading to the situation that only Israeli activities would be reported." In other words, Israel has a complaint box; the Palestinians don't. Or, as Powell himself put it last year, "To go in and find out what one side is doing doesn't make them monitors or observers; it makes them something else." In the name of satisfying our Arab friends, we may soon find out what. ■

Why John McCain is the Democrats' best hope.

What's in a Name?

By JONATHAN CHAIT

JOHN WEAVER HUNCHES his angular frame over a Styrofoam cup of coffee in the basement cafeteria of the United States Senate and tries to explain what might seem—to an outsider—his peculiar political loyalties. Once a loyal Republican strategist who directed the presidential aspirations of über-conservative Phil Gramm and helped plot John McCain's maverick primary run in 2000, he has since reregistered as a Democrat and severed consulting ties to all Republicans except McCain, for whom he still serves as chief strategist. "I only work for Democrats now," he tells me. Noticing that he has overlooked the party affiliation of his most prominent advisee, I helpfully add: "And John McCain." Weaver shrugs his shoulders and grins, "Oh, right."

It's easy to forget that the Arizona senator is not, in fact, a Democrat. In the past year he has stood against his party on so many prominent and contentious issues that his concurrences with GOP dogma have become more of an exception than a rule. In the conservative media, he has become a figure of vilification on par with Tom Daschle. Last fall, when his name came up in a meeting of House Republicans, he was booed. And it is no exaggeration to say that he has co-sponsored virtually the entire domestic agenda of the Democratic Party. One prominent Democrat enthuses, "He's the leader of the loyal opposition." Typically that role falls to a leader of the opposition party. But the most popular and effective champion of the Democratic Party's values isn't Tom Daschle. It's John McCain. And at a moment when the party is casting about for a leader to define it against a popular president, and McCain is casting about for a home after his virtual expulsion from the GOP, there is an obvious solution to both dilemmas: John McCain ought to become a Democrat—and a presumptive front-runner for the party's presidential nomination in 2004.

If there's been relatively little discussion of McCain switching parties, it's largely because few have completely assimilated the extent of his political transformation. One reason is that McCain and his staff systematically pooh-pooh it. Conservatives attack McCain on ideological grounds, so his supporters respond, understandably, by downplaying the ideological nature of his apostasy—insisting, for instance, that he has merely gained a greater appreciation for bipartisanship. "I am fundamentally, philosophically, the same person that I have been," McCain told *National Journal* last summer. A second reason is that political reporters prefer personal or characterological explanations over ideological ones, and in McCain they have a perfect one: He and his staff still bear the scars of their bitter 2000 primary campaign against George W. Bush. Naturally, reporters interpret McCain's opposition to Bush's agenda—or Bush's opposition to McCain's—as merely a grudge match between the two former rivals.

In truth, though, McCain's objection to Bush's agenda stems from a genuine difference of belief about the nature of the public good. As I noted in these pages two years ago ("This Man Is Not a Republican," January 31, 2000), McCain's ideological evolution began fitfully and, to some extent, unconsciously. McCain ran for Barry Goldwater's seat

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

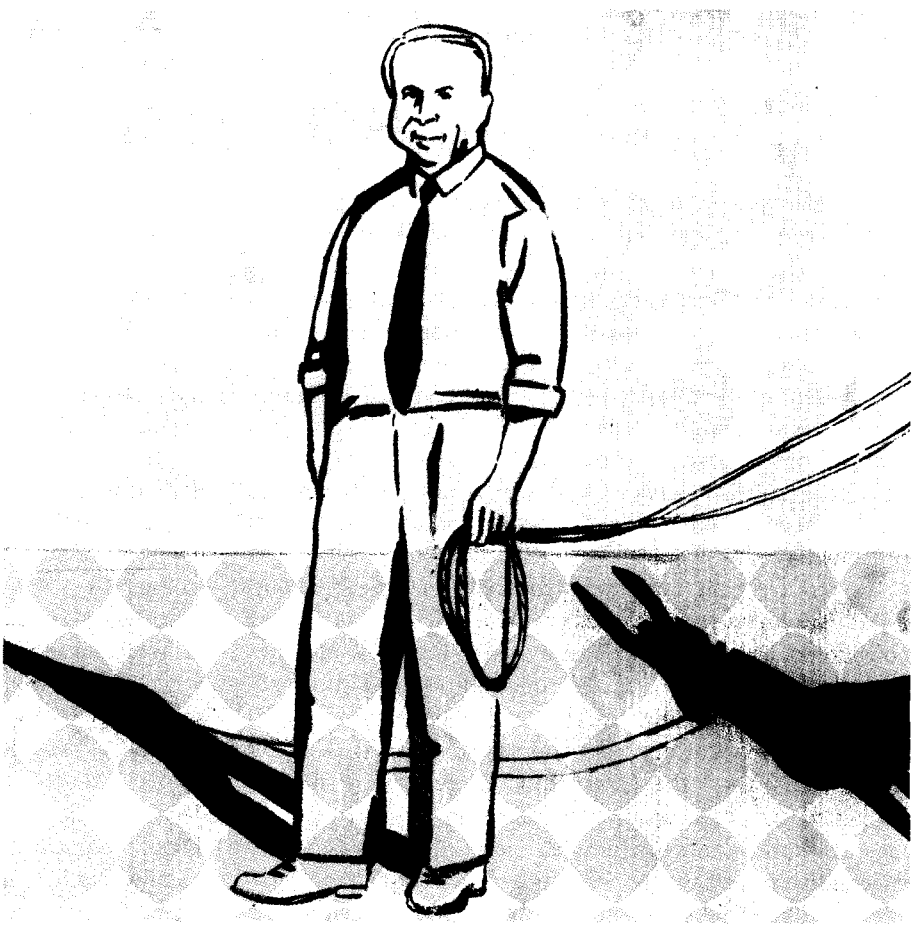
in the Senate in 1986, promising voters they'd never know the difference. Yet he gradually developed a maverick streak and, by the late Clinton years, was crusading on behalf of campaign finance reform and restrictions on the tobacco industry. Still, McCain remained a Republican in good standing until his presidential bid, which forced him to formulate positions on domestic issues that, as he explained to me at the time, he had never before spent much time pondering. When he did, he found that his instincts to advance the broader interest over individual entitlement left him in favor of the sort of moderate fiscal conservatism advanced by President Bill Clinton and opposed to the traditional GOP nostrum of upper-bracket tax cuts. It was his tax cut heresy that ultimately rendered McCain a pariah among the party elite. The conservative interests that form the GOP base struck at him with a vengeance, most notably in South Carolina; and the ferocity further alienated McCain and his loyalists. Pretty soon McCain was veering off in directions nobody could have foreseen even a few months before, openly pointing out that Bush's tax cut favored the rich and attacking influential religious conservatives like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell as "forces of evil." As Marshall Wittmann, who advised McCain during the primary, puts it, "Ideologically, we all changed."

The degree to which McCain has abandoned contemporary conservatism is reflected in the legislative program he has championed since Bush took office. Most notably, of course, he shepherded campaign finance reform—an effort that put him in close cooperation with Democrats in Congress. McCain also collaborated with liberal Democrats John Edwards and Ted Kennedy on a patients' bill of rights; with Charles Schumer on more widespread sale of generic prescription drugs; with Ernest Hollings to put federal employees in charge of airport security—all of which set him against fierce business lobbying. And he teamed up with Evan Bayh to promote AmeriCorps, an effort Bush later co-opted with his own smaller AmeriCorps boost.

But perhaps most amazing has been McCain's willingness to take stands even many Democrats are afraid of. He voted against Bush's tax cut, the centerpiece of the new president's agenda. Along with John Kerry, he sponsored legislation to raise automobile emissions standards, and he paired with Joe Lieberman to try to force Bush to reduce greenhouse gases in compliance with the Kyoto accord. Also with Lieberman, McCain has proposed forcing people who buy firearms at gun shows to undergo background checks—closing the "gun-show loophole"—even as most Democrats shy away from any form of gun control. He has infuriated the gambling industry by proposing to ban wagering on college sports. And along with Carl Levin, he has co-sponsored a bill to force companies that deduct executive stock options from their taxes to disclose the cost on their financial statements—another effort few Democrats have been willing to join.

One conclusion to draw from all this is simply that McCain has guts. But there's more to it than that. McCain's domestic agenda increasingly consists of bold reforms that expand the scope of the federal government. During the campaign, McCain paid lip service to anti-government bromides while supporting government intervention in specific instances. In the last year, though, his ideology has grown coherently progressive. "We have had regulatory agencies always to curb the abuses or potential abuses of the capitalist system," he said earlier this year on CBS's "Face the Nation." "This is not a totally laissez-faire country." McCain, in other words, now believes in progressive government to counteract the excesses of the market and recognizes that the mere fact that business interests complain about such intervention does not by itself make it wrong. There is a term for people who think like this: Democrats.

So why does McCain remain in the GOP? Aside from sentimental attachment, McCain idolizes Teddy Roosevelt and sees his mission as reshaping the GOP in his hero's image: progressive; crusading; independent from (and frequently at odds with) business; willing to use federal power for the greater good; and representing all economic classes, not just the rich. It's a noble aim. Alas, it isn't working. Under Bush,



HADLEY HOOPER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the GOP has grown more wedded to business interests than at any time since the 1920s. The White House and K Street coordinate policy so tightly that their agendas are frequently impossible to separate. And on high-profile issues, McCain's legislative coalitions consist entirely, or almost entirely, of Democrats.

McCain's invocation of Roosevelt, of course, has a second purpose: It suggests that he, like T.R., might bolt the Republican Party and launch an independent presidential bid. It doesn't take a great deal of imagination to read this possibility into some of McCain's comments. Last summer, for example, he told *Newsweek*, "There is a growing vacuum out there. Unless the two parties move to fill that vacuum, you will see the rise of independent candidates." And while McCain has since clammed up about running for president, the idea of an independent bid remains alive among his admirers. Wittmann, who works at the Hudson Institute but remains close to McCain, publishes a daily Internet commentary under the title "The Bull Moose," in which he teases readers with periodic hints of a McCain independent run.

A MCCAIN INDEPENDENT candidacy, however, would stand little chance of winning. Since his primary run, polls show McCain's popularity has grown among Democrats while collapsing among Republicans. As a result, a McCain third-party run would probably guarantee Bush's reelection. The latest poll on this, taken in June, showed a match between Bush and a generic Democrat splitting voters evenly at 44 percent each. If McCain were to enter the race, though, almost all his support would come at the Democratic nominee's expense—the Democrat would drop to 29 percent, while Bush would fall to just 42 percent, with McCain trailing both at 22 percent. While one shouldn't read too much into these numbers—it is, after all, a poll of a hypothetical matchup more than three years in advance of the actual election—it is hard to imagine an independent McCain run having any effect other than to split the center-left vote. The basis of his candidacy, after all, would be a populist critique of Bush for putting special interests ahead of the broader good—almost certainly the same theme a Democrat would take up. If Bush could merely hold onto his base, with whom he's extremely popular, he'd win. The essential problem with an independent McCain candidacy is that his political profile, like his profile as a legislator, has become that of a hawkish Democrat. Which raises an obvious, if rarely discussed, possibility: Why shouldn't McCain run for president as a Democrat?

It's strange that amidst all the political gossip about a McCain third-party candidacy, Washington has barely considered the far more logical possibility of a McCain *second*-party candidacy. Last summer one senator informed *Newsweek* that McCain himself has discussed the idea. "'I know he's looked at our field and said to himself, 'I could take these guys,'" the (presumably Democratic) senator explained. Yet the capital's political rumor industry, which usually requires only the flimsiest scrap of data to launch a speculative frenzy, completely ignored this tidbit. The conventional wisdom seems to be that Democrats wouldn't accept McCain. Elizabeth Drew, whose recent book *Citizen McCain* reflects the McCainiac worldview, writes, "McCain, with his conservative record on issues such as abortion, would never be welcome in the Democratic Party." But while McCain's *historical* voting record may be conservative, his recent record in Congress is anything but. In off-the-record conversations, Republicans argued that Democrats would never accept McCain, while Democrats—even very liberal ones—said just the opposite. The assumption that McCain is at ideological loggerheads with the Democratic Party either misunderstands McCain, or the Democratic Party, or both.

SOME OF MCCAIN'S supporters, for instance, argue that his interventionist views on foreign policy would render him unacceptable to Democratic primary voters. But while some liberal elites may harbor misgivings about McCain's muscular internationalism, there is no mass constituency for dovish policies these days, even among Democrats. And it's easy to exaggerate the foreign policy cleavage between the two parties. In recent years the boundaries of the foreign policy debate have grown extremely fluid, with Democrats and Republicans switching back and forth depending in large part upon whose party held the White House. It wasn't long ago, after all, that a Democratic president was urging military intervention (in the Balkans), while Republicans in Congress were appealing to isolationism. The political class in both parties remains oriented around domestic policy. It's far easier to join a party with whom you already agree on the role of government at home and change its foreign policy than to do the reverse.

And the most prominent feature of Democratic foreign policy since September 11 is that there isn't much of one. Yes, a couple Democrats—mostly old cranks like Robert Byrd and Hollings—have worried about an open-ended conflict; but others—such as Lieberman—have staked out terrain to Bush's right. The general mood among Democrats in Washington is to lay low on foreign affairs and to confront Bush in the domestic arena. Not only does this mean that McCain's hawkishness would pose little barrier to his nomination; it also presents him with an opportunity to determine what kind of Democratic foreign policy will emerge in the wake of the war on terror. And here McCain has a chance to shape the future of American politics—which, like all things historical, can be highly contingent. After all, if Franklin Roosevelt hadn't replaced Henry Wallace with Harry Truman as his vice president, the Democratic Party would not have built its policy of containment in the two decades after World War II. In the post-post Vietnam era now beginning, McCain could redefine the Democratic Party once again as the champion of Wilsonian interventionism.

The more serious objection is McCain's positions on social policy, especially abortion. Political analysts in both parties told me his pro-life views would cripple him in a Democratic primary. Yet this ought not be a disqualifying factor. *Roe* v. *Wade* is settled precedent. Keeping it from being overturned doesn't require liberal, pro-choice Supreme Court justices. It merely requires moderates who respect established precedent. Clinton did not nominate judicial activists; he nomi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nated moderates who voted very much like Richard Nixon's and Gerald Ford's appointees. So long as McCain avoided appointing aggressive conservatives, there's no reason to think his appointments would have any practical effect.

Moreover, it has gotten hard to discern to what degree McCain is actually anti-abortion at all. At one point during his primary run, he told a reporter that "certainly in the short term or even the long term I would not support the repeal of *Roe* v. *Wade*." Another time, when asked what he would do if his daughter sought an abortion, McCain replied that he'd leave the final decision to her. In both instances, he restated his anti-abortion position after the ensuing uproar, but polls showed that voters believed he was pro-choice. In the last year McCain reversed himself and came out in favor of stem-cell research. So while it's hard to figure out where he stands, the best guess is that he remains personally against abortion but neutral, or even opposed to, making it illegal. Liberals might not find this position completely satisfying, but they ought to be able to live with it. Mario Cuomo took essentially this view of abortion, after all, and it did not prevent him from becoming a beloved figure among party activists.

BESIDES, MCCAIN WOULDN'T need to be the favorite candidate of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League and People For the American Way. If McCain were to run as a Democrat, he would, as four years before, go over the heads of constituency groups and appeal directly to the grass roots. McCain has great appeal among both rank-and-file labor and the reform-minded upper-middle-class voters who flocked to the good-government messages of candidates like Bill Bradley and Paul Tsongas.

As in 2000, he would draw independent voters who, in the absence of a contested GOP primary, might support him in even higher numbers than last time. (What else would moderate Republicans do on primary day?) Even if the Democratic establishment rejected McCain altogether, as the GOP establishment did last time around, McCain could still win. Why? In 2000 anti-McCain Republicans rallied around a single alternative: Bush. In 2004 anti-McCain Democrats, lacking a single unifying choice, would split among several alternatives.

And there's another reason for even hard-core Democrats to swallow their ideological qualms about McCain: After September 11 he may be the only candidate who could beat Bush. It's not just that McCain retains wild popularity among the independents who decide elections. September 11 has transformed the political landscape in two critical ways. The first is widely understood: It erased doubts about Bush's legitimacy and competence. The second is less understood but even more important: It made foreign policy once again a crucial political criterion. During the last two decades of the cold war, Democrats won the White House only once, in large part because voters harbored doubts about their toughness on foreign affairs. Every Democrat had to clear this hurdle, and most—picture Michael Dukakis in the tank—failed to do so.

The natural Republican advantage on "toughness" remains. Consider the last election. Democrats nominated a sitting vice president who had enlisted in the military during wartime and earned a reputation as a hawk during the 1980s. Republicans nominated an inexperienced governor who avoided serving in Vietnam by taking refuge in the National Guard and who was known for flubbing the names of foreign countries and leaders. Al Gore's budget allocated more for defense than did Bush's. And polls showed the public *still* trusted the Republican more to handle defense. Yes, Democrats carried the popular vote, as they have in all three elections since the end of the cold war. But that's exactly the point: The fall of the Berlin Wall reduced foreign policy's political importance, allowing Democrats to win on the basis of their more popular domestic positions. Since 9/11 the country has reverted to a cold war political environment, and popular domestic positions alone won't overcome the public's doubts about Democratic toughness. In different ways, Gore, Lieberman, and Kerry each has credentials that would give him a shot at overcoming this burden. But none has as good a shot as McCain—a former POW with an awe-inspiring personal story and a history of aggressively backing American military efforts.

When he ran for president two years ago, McCain liked to say that he patterned his views not only after Theodore Roosevelt but also—perhaps in part to protect himself ideologically—Ronald Reagan. His admirers still compare him to Roosevelt, but they rarely refer to Reagan anymore. The comparison they invoke—I have heard it a half-dozen times—is Henry "Scoop" Jackson, the prominent cold war Democratic senator. Both Roosevelt and Jackson offer cautionary examples for McCain.

Jackson's enthusiasts today come mainly from the ranks of conservatives who admire his hawkish commitment to using American power to promote democratic values across the globe. But Jackson believed just as deeply in using the government to promote a decent society on our own shores. On domestic policy he was a classic New Deal liberal, and, while McCain more closely tracks the thinking of New Democrats, he and Jackson share the same confidence in progressive, reformist government.

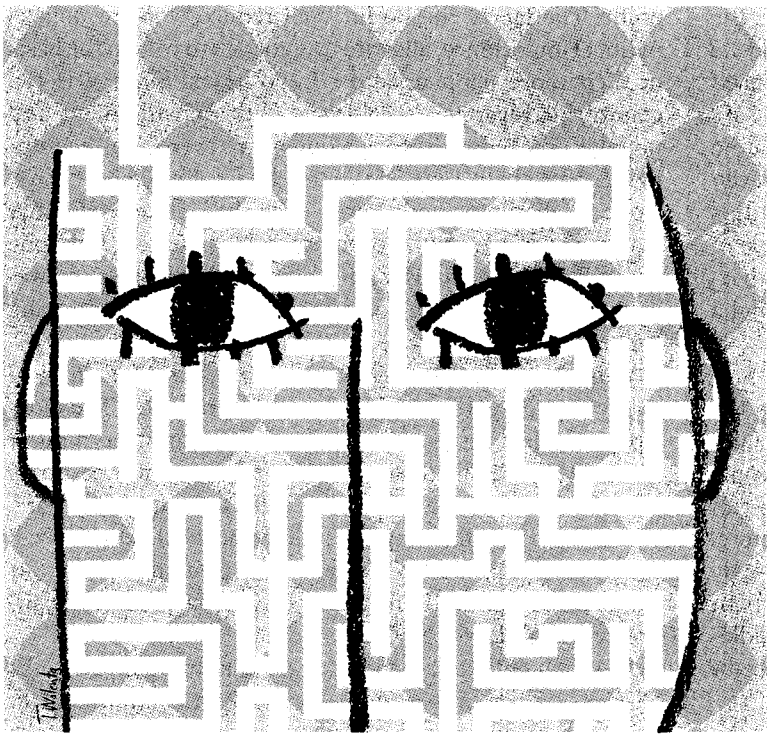
YET JACKSON'S ULTIMATE legacy is failure. He ran for president and lost in the primaries in 1972 and 1976, at a time when the Democratic Party's foreign policy remained in the grip of McGovernism. While he remained a forceful presence in Congress, he is remembered for representing what his party was not, rather than what it was. Roosevelt, too, provides a problematic model. He sought the presidency as an independent and lost as well, leaving the GOP dominated by its money wing. The lessons are clear: You change history not from Congress but from the White House, and not as an independent but as the leader of a major party in which your ideas can be institutionalized and carried on by others. Only a handful of politicians per generation capture the public's imagination and channel it toward moral and rational ends. McCain has the opportunity to do this. He can leave his imprint on history, but history will not come to him. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A secular argument against research cloning.

Crossing Lines

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER



THE PROBLEM

You were once a single cell. Every one of the 100 trillion cells in your body today is a direct descendent of that zygote, the primordial cell formed by the union of mother's egg and father's sperm. Each one is genetically identical (allowing for copying errors and environmental damage along the way) to that cell. Therefore, if we scraped a cell from, say, the inner lining of your cheek, its DNA would be the same DNA that, years ago in the original zygote, contained the entire plan for creating you and every part of you.

Here is the mystery: Why can the zygote, as it multiplies, produce every different kind of cell in the body—kidney, liver, brain, skin—while the skin cell is destined, however many times it multiplies, to remain skin forever? As the embryo matures, cells become specialized and lose their flexibility and plasticity. Once an adult cell has specialized—differentiated, in scientific lingo—it is stuck forever in that specialty. Skin is skin; kidney is kidney.

Understanding that mystery holds the keys to the kingdom. The Holy Grail of modern biology is regenerative medicine. If we can figure out how to make a specialized adult cell dedifferentiate—unspecialize, i.e., revert way back to the embryonic stage, perhaps even to the original zygotic stage—and then grow it like an embryo under controlled circumstances, we could reproduce for you every kind of tissue or organ you might need. We could create a storehouse of repair parts for your body. And, if we let that dedifferentiated cell develop completely in a woman's uterus, we will have created a copy of you, your clone.

That is the promise and the menace of cloning. It has already been done in sheep, mice, goats, pigs, cows, and now cats and rabbits (though cloning rabbits seems an exercise in biological redundancy). There is no reason in principle why it cannot be done in humans. The question is: Should it be done?

Notice that the cloning question is really two questions: (1) May we grow that dedifferentiated cell all the way into a cloned baby, a copy of you? That is called reproductive cloning. And (2) may we grow that dedifferentiated cell just into the embryonic stage and then mine it for parts, such as stem cells? That is called research cloning.

Reproductive cloning is universally abhorred. In July 2001 the House of Representatives, a fairly good representative of the American people, took up the issue and not a single member defended reproductive cloning. Research cloning, however, is the hard one. Some members were prepared to permit the cloning of the human embryo in order to study and use its component parts, with the proviso that the embryo be destroyed before it grows into a fetus or child. They were a minority, however. Their amendment banning baby-making but permitting research cloning was defeated by 76 votes. On July 31, 2001, a bill outlawing all cloning passed the House decisively.

Within weeks, perhaps days, the Senate will vote on essentially the same alternatives. On this vote will hinge the course of the genetic revolution at whose threshold we now stand.

THE PROMISE

This is how research cloning works. You take a donor egg from a woman, remove its nucleus, and inject the nucleus of, say, a skin cell from another person. It has been shown in animals that by the right manipulation you can trick the egg and the injected nucleus into dedifferentiating—that means

Contributing Editor CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER, a syndicated columnist and a medical doctor, has been writing about medical ethics for TNR since 1979. Although he is a member of the President's Council on Bioethics, the views expressed here are his alone and may not represent the views of the Council.

TOMASZ WALENTA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

giving up all the specialization of the skin cell and returning to its original state as a primordial cell that could become anything in the body.

In other words, this cell becomes totipotent. It becomes the equivalent of the fertilized egg in normal procreation, except that instead of having chromosomes from two people, it has chromosomes from one. This cell then behaves precisely like an embryo. It divides. It develops. At four to seven days, it forms a "blastocyst" consisting of about 100 to 200 cells.

The main objective of cloning researchers would be to disassemble this blastocyst: pull the stem cells out, grow them in the laboratory, and then try to tease them into becoming specific kinds of cells, say, kidney or heart or brain and so on.

There would be two purposes for doing this: study or cure. You could take a cell from a person with a baffling disease, like Lou Gehrig's, clone it into a blastocyst, pull the stem cells out, and then study them in order to try to understand the biology of the illness. Or you could begin with a cell from a person with Parkinson's or a spinal cord injury, clone it, and tease out the stem cells to develop tissue that you would reinject into the original donor to, in theory, cure the Parkinson's or spinal cord injury. The advantage of using a cloned cell rather than an ordinary stem cell is that, presumably, there would be no tissue rejection. It's your own DNA. The body would recognize it. You'd have a perfect match.

(Research cloning is sometimes called therapeutic cloning, but that is a misleading term. First, because therapy by reinjection is only one of the many uses to which this cloning can be put. Moreover, it is not therapeutic for the clone—indeed, the clone is invariably destroyed in the process—though it may be therapeutic for others. If you donate a kidney to your brother, it would be odd to call *your* operation a therapeutic nephrectomy. It is not. It's a sacrificial nephrectomy.)

The conquest of rejection is one of the principal rationales for research cloning. But there is reason to doubt this claim on scientific grounds. There is some empirical evidence in mice that cloned tissue may be rejected anyway (possibly because a clone contains a small amount of foreign—mitochondrial—DNA derived from the egg into which it was originally injected). Moreover, enormous advances are being made elsewhere in combating tissue rejection. The science of immune rejection is much more mature than the science of cloning. By the time we figure out how to do safe and reliable research cloning, the rejection problem may well be solved. And finally, there are less problematic alternatives—such as adult stem cells—that offer a promising alternative to cloning because they present no problem of tissue rejection and raise none of cloning's moral conundrums.

These scientific considerations raise serious questions about the efficacy of, and thus the need for, research cloning. But there is a stronger case to be made. Even if the scientific objections are swept aside, even if research cloning is as doable and promising as its advocates contend, there are other reasons to pause.

The most obvious is this: Research cloning is an open door to reproductive cloning. Banning the production of cloned babies while permitting the production of cloned embryos makes no sense. If you have factories all around the country producing embryos for research and commerce, it is inevitable that someone will implant one in a woman (or perhaps in some artificial medium in the farther future) and produce a human clone. What then? A law banning reproductive cloning but permitting research cloning would then make it a crime *not* to destroy that fetus—an obvious moral absurdity.

This is an irrefutable point and the reason that many in Congress will vote for the total ban on cloning. Philosophically, however, it is a showstopper. It lets us off too early and too easy. It keeps us from facing the deeper question: Is there anything about research cloning that *in and of itself* makes it morally problematic?

Objection I: Intrinsic Worth

For some people, life begins at conception. And not just life—if life is understood to mean a biologically functioning organism, even a single cell is obviously alive—but personhood. If the first zygotic cell is owed all the legal and moral respect due a person, then there is nothing to talk about. Ensoulment starts with Day One and Cell One, and the idea of taking that cell or its successor cells apart to serve someone else's needs is abhorrent.

This is an argument of great moral force but little intellectual interest. Not because it may not be right. But because it is unprovable. It rests on metaphysics. Either you believe it or you don't. The discussion ends there.

I happen not to share this view. I do not believe personhood begins at conception. I do not believe a single cell has the moral or legal standing of a child. This is not to say that I do not stand in awe of the developing embryo, a creation of majestic beauty and mystery. But I stand in equal awe of the Grand Canyon, the spider's web, and quantum mechanics. Awe commands wonder, humility, appreciation. It does not command inviolability. I am quite prepared to shatter an atom, take down a spider's web, or dam a canyon for electricity. (Though we'd have to be very short on electricity before I'd dam the Grand.)

I do not believe the embryo is entitled to inviolability. But is it entitled to nothing? There is a great distance between inviolability, on the one hand, and mere "thingness," on the other. Many advocates of research cloning see nothing but thingness. That view justifies the most ruthless exploitation of the embryo. That view is dangerous.

Why? Three possible reasons. First, the Brave New World Factor: Research cloning gives man too much power for evil. Second, the Slippery Slope: The habit of embryonic violation is in and of itself dangerous. Violate the blastocyst today and every day, and the practice will inure you to violating the fetus or even the infant tomorrow. Third, Manufacture: The very act of creating embryos for the sole purpose of exploiting and then destroying them will ultimately predispose us to a ruthless utilitarianism about human life itself.

Objection II: The Brave New World Factor

The physicists at Los Alamos did not hesitate to penetrate, manipulate, and split uranium atoms on the grounds that uranium atoms possess intrinsic worth that entitled them to inviolability. Yet after the war, many fought to curtail atomic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

power. They feared the consequences of delivering such unfathomable power—and potential evil—into the hands of fallible human beings. Analogously, one could believe that the cloned blastocyst has little more intrinsic worth than the uranium atom and still be deeply troubled by the manipulation of the blastocyst because of the fearsome power it confers upon humankind.

The issue is leverage. Our knowledge of how to manipulate human genetics (or atomic nuclei) is still primitive. We could never construct ex nihilo a human embryo. It is an unfolding organism of unimaginable complexity that took nature three billion years to produce. It might take us less time to build it from scratch, but not much less. By that time, we as a species might have acquired enough wisdom to use it wisely. Instead, the human race in its infancy has stumbled upon a genie infinitely too complicated to create or even fully understand, but understandable enough to command and perhaps even control. And given our demonstrated unwisdom with our other great discovery—atomic power: As we speak, the very worst of humanity is on the threshold of acquiring the most powerful weapons in history—this is a fear and a consideration to be taken very seriously.

For example. Female human eggs seriously limit the mass production of cloned embryos. Extracting eggs from women is difficult, expensive, and potentially dangerous. The search is on, therefore, for a good alternative. Scientists have begun injecting human nuclei into the egg cells of animals. In 1996 Massachusetts scientists injected a human nucleus with a cow egg. Chinese scientists have fused a human fibroblast with a rabbit egg and have grown the resulting embryo to the blastocyst stage. We have no idea what grotesque results might come from such interspecies clonal experiments.

In October 2000 the first primate containing genes from another species was born (a monkey with a jellyfish gene). In 1995 researchers in Texas produced headless mice. In 1997 researchers in Britain produced headless tadpoles. In theory, headlessness might be useful for organ transplantation. One can envision, in a world in which embryos are routinely manufactured, the production of headless clones—subhuman creatures with usable human organs but no head, no brain, no consciousness to identify them with the human family.

The heart of the problem is this: Nature, through endless evolution, has produced cells with totipotent power. We are about to harness that power for crude human purposes. That should give us pause. Just around the corner lies the logical by-product of such power: human-animal hybrids, partly developed human bodies for use as parts, and other horrors imagined—Huxley's Deltas and Epsilons—and as yet unimagined. This is the Brave New World Factor. Its grounds for objecting to this research are not about the beginnings of life, but about the ends; not the origin of these cells, but their destiny; not where we took these magnificent cells from, but where they are taking us.

Objection III: The Slippery Slope

The other prudential argument is that once you start tearing apart blastocysts, you get used to tearing apart blastocysts. And whereas now you'd only be doing that at the seven-day stage, when most people would look at this tiny clump of cells on the head of a pin and say it is not inviolable, it is inevitable that some scientist will soon say: Give me just a few more weeks to work with it and I could do wonders.

That will require quite a technological leap because the blastocyst will not develop as a human organism unless implanted in the uterus. That means that to go beyond that seven-day stage you'd have to implant this human embryo either in an animal uterus or in some fully artificial womb.

Both possibilities may be remote, but they are real. And then we'll have a scientist saying: Give me just a few more months with this embryo, and I'll have actual kidney cells, brain cells, pancreatic cells that I can transplant back into the donor of the clone and cure him. Scientists at Advanced Cell Technology in Massachusetts have already gone past that stage in animals. They have taken cloned cow embryos past the blastocyst stage, taken tissue from the more developed cow fetus, and reimplanted it back into the donor animal.

The scientists' plea to do the same in humans will be hard to ignore. Why grow the clone just to the blastocyst stage, destroy it, pull out the inner cell mass, grow stem cells out of that, propagate them in the laboratory, and then try chemically or otherwise to tweak them into becoming kidney cells or brain cells or islet cells? This is Rube Goldberg. Why not just allow that beautiful embryonic machine, created by nature and far more sophisticated than our crude techniques, to develop unmolested? Why not let the blastocyst grow into a fetus that possesses the kinds of differentiated tissue that we could then use for curing the donor?

Scientifically, this would make sense. Morally, we will have crossed the line between tearing apart a mere clump of cells and tearing apart a recognizable human fetus. And at that point, it would be an even smaller step to begin carving up seven- and eight-month-old fetuses with more perfectly formed organs to alleviate even more pain and suffering among the living. We will, slowly and by increments, have gone from stem cells to embryo farms to factories with fetuses in various stages of development and humanness, hanging (metaphorically) on meat hooks waiting to be cut open to be used by the already born.

We would all be revolted if a living infant or developed fetus were carved up for parts. Should we build a fence around that possibility by prohibiting any research on even the very earliest embryonic clump of cells? Is the only way to avoid the slide never to mount the slippery slope at all? On this question, I am personally agnostic. If I were utterly convinced that we would never cross the seven-day line, then I would have no objection on these grounds to such research on the inner cell mass of a blastocyst. The question is: Can we be sure? This is not a question of principle; it is a question of prudence. It is almost a question of psychological probability. No one yet knows the answer.

Objection IV: Manufacture

Note that while, up to now, I have been considering arguments against research cloning, they are all equally applicable to embryonic research done on a normal—i.e., noncloned—embryo. If the question is tearing up the blastocyst, there is no intrinsic moral difference between a two-parented embryo derived from a sperm and an egg and a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

single-parented embryo derived from a cloned cell. Thus the various arguments against this research—the intrinsic worth of the embryo, the prudential consideration that we might create monsters, or the prudential consideration that we might *become* monsters in exploiting post-embryonic forms of human life (fetuses or even children)—are identical to the arguments for and against stem-cell research.

These arguments are serious—serious enough to banish the insouciance of the scientists who consider anyone questioning their work to be a Luddite—yet, in my view, insufficient to justify a legal ban on stem-cell research (as with stem cells from discarded embryos in fertility clinics). I happen not to believe that either personhood or ensoulment occurs at conception. I think we need to be apprehensive about what evil might arise from the power of stem-cell research, but that apprehension alone, while justifying vigilance and regulation, does not justify a ban on the practice. And I believe that given the good that might flow from stem-cell research, we should first test the power of law and custom to enforce the seven-day blastocyst line for embryonic exploitation before assuming that such a line could never hold.

This is why I support stem-cell research (using leftover embryos from fertility clinics) and might support research cloning were it not for one other aspect that is unique to it. In research cloning, the embryo is created with the explicit intention of its eventual destruction. That is a given because not to destroy the embryo would be to produce a cloned child. If you are not permitted to grow the embryo into a child, you are obliged at some point to destroy it.

Deliberately creating embryos for eventual and certain destruction means the launching of an entire industry of embryo manufacture. It means the routinization, the commercialization, the commodification of the human embryo. The bill that would legalize research cloning essentially sanctions, licenses, and protects the establishment of a most ghoulish enterprise: the creation of nascent human life for the sole purpose of its exploitation and destruction.

How is this morally different from simply using discarded embryos from in vitro fertilization (IVF) clinics? Some have suggested that it is not, that to oppose research cloning is to oppose IVF and any stem-cell research that comes out of IVF. The claim is made that because in IVF there is a high probability of destruction of the embryo, it is morally equivalent to research cloning. But this is plainly not so. In research cloning there is not a high probability of destruction; there is 100 percent probability. Because every cloned embryo must be destroyed, it is nothing more than a means to someone else's end.

In IVF, the probability of destruction may be high, but it need not necessarily be. You could have a clinic that produces only a small number of embryos, and we know of many cases of multiple births resulting from multiple embryo implantation. In principle, one could have IVF using only a single embryo and thus involving no deliberate embryo destruction at all. In principle, that is impossible in research cloning.

Furthermore, a cloned embryo is created to be destroyed and used by others. An IVF embryo is created to develop into a child. One cannot disregard intent in determining morality. Embryos are created in IVF to serve reproduction. Embryos are created in research cloning to serve, well, research. If certain IVF embryos were designated as "helper embryos" that would simply aid an anointed embryo in turning into a child, then we would have an analogy to cloning. But, in fact, we don't know which embryo is anointed in IVF. They are all created to have a chance of survival. And they are all equally considered an end.

Critics counter that this ends-and-means argument is really obfuscation, that both procedures make an instrument of the embryo. In cloning, the creation and destruction of the embryo is a means to understanding or curing disease. In IVF, the creation of the embryo is a means of satisfying a couple's need for a child. They are both just means to ends.

But it makes no sense to call an embryo a means to the creation of a child. The creation of a child is the *destiny* of an embryo. To speak of an embryo as a means to creating a child empties the word "means" of content. The embryo in IVF is a stage in the development of a child; it is no more a means than a teenager is a means to the adult he or she later becomes. In contrast, an embryo in research cloning is pure means. Laboratory pure.

And that is where we must draw the line. During the great debate on stem-cell research, a rather broad consensus was reached (among those not committed to "intrinsic worth" rendering all embryos inviolable) that stem-cell research could be morally justified because the embryos destroyed for their possibly curative stem cells were derived from fertility clinics and thus were going to be discarded anyway. It was understood that human embryos should not be created solely for the purpose of being dismembered and then destroyed for the benefit of others. Indeed, when Senator Bill Frist made his impassioned presentation on the floor of the Senate supporting stem-cell research, he included among his conditions a total ban on creating human embryos just to be stem-cell farms.

Where cloning for research takes us decisively beyond stem-cell research is in sanctioning the manufacture of the human embryo. You can try to regulate embryonic research to prohibit the creation of Brave New World monsters; you can build fences on the slippery slope, regulating how many days you may grow an embryo for research; but once you countenance the very creation of human embryos for no other purpose than for their parts, you have crossed a moral frontier.

Research cloning is the ultimate in conferring thingness up on the human embryo. It is the ultimate in desensitization. And as such, it threatens whatever other fences and safeguards we might erect around embryonic research. The problem, one could almost say, is not what cloning does to the embryo, but what it does to us. Except that, once cloning has changed us, it will inevitably enable further assaults on human dignity. Creating a human embryo just so it can be used and then destroyed undermines the very foundation of the moral prudence that informs the entire enterprise of genetic research: the idea that, while a human embryo may not be a person, it is not nothing. Because if it is nothing, then everything is permitted. And if everything is permitted, then there are no fences, no safeguards, no bottom. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Period Pieces

THOMAS H. INCE, an outstanding producer-director-writer in the early Hollywood days, died on November 19, 1924. A long obituary in *Exceptional Photoplays* said that "with the death of Thomas H. Ince, one of the most spectacular and interesting figures passed from motion pictures," but it didn't mention that Ince died under mysterious circumstances. The facts about his death have never been confirmed, but—principally because the incident involved some important people besides Ince—it was, and still is, a site of speculation.

Ince was a guest on board William Randolph Hearst's yacht, cruising off the California coast. Also on board besides the host were Hearst's longtime beloved, the film star Marion Davies; the already renowned Charlie Chaplin (although Chaplin rather feebly denied later that he had been present); the famous romantic novelist Elinor Glyn; the not-yet-famous gossip columnist Louella Parsons; and others. Ince, as far as anyone knew, had been in perfect health, yet he was carried off the yacht on a stretcher and taken to a hospital, where his death from a heart attack was soon announced. Rumors buzzed, but the story remained nebulous.

The Cat's Meow (Lions Gate), written by Steven Peros, gives an account of the matter that cannot be proved or disproved. (The title is 1920s slang that means perfection. Its relevance here, even ironically, is obscure.) Peros tells us that Hearst suspected his mistress of carrying on with Chaplin and at last, maddened by a love note that he discovered, shot a man whom he saw sitting in the darkness on the yacht chatting with Davies. That man, who was of the same build as Chaplin and who happened to be wearing a Chaplin-style derby, was Ince. Hearst spent considerable money and leaned heavily on relevant people to keep the truth suppressed. (Since this story has long been conjectured in print, I'm not spilling any whodunit beans.)

The film was directed by Peter Bogdanovich, returning after an eight-year absence, and he flaunts his abilities and his shortcomings once again. He certainly knows how to make a story flow, and he certainly knows how to get the best out of actors. The key performance is that of the protagonist, Hearst, and Edward Herrmann gives the man true authority and fallibility, an imperial figure riven with garden-variety jealousy. (With this character, Bogdanovich presumably had *Citizen Kane* in mind, a story notoriously modeled on Hearst. This Hearst even has a room-wrecking rampage, lesser than but reminiscent of the rampage in *Kane*.) I kept wishing that Herrmann had a more capacious film for his utterly persuasive performance. Kirsten Dunst, as Davies, has more charm and wit than I ever encountered in Davies herself. Ince, played by Cary Elwes, is not written with much flavor; Eddie Izzard, as Chaplin, luckily doesn't have to do much "Charlie" business and is pleasant.

But Bogdanovich shows once again that he is a kind of film provincial. His best film, *The Last Picture Show*, was set outside that province, but look at the title. His first picture, *Targets*, was a hymn to Boris Karloff; his others include *Nickelodeon*, about silent-film beginnings, and *At Long Last Love*, a hymn to Hollywood musicals. For anyone who has followed Bogdanovich's career, *The Cat's Meow* seems as if he is taking refuge in familiar, circumscribed knowledge.

This lolling in Movieland leads to slippage. Bogdanovich pounces on the Ince story without, apparently, wondering whether it still matters to most of us. Worse, Ince is flavorless here, more remote than he need have been. Even Hearst is no longer a familiar titan. A more gripping story, instead of a mere unfolding of predictabilities, could have helped. For me, with a doubtlessly parochial perspective, the worst chills in this whole episode, as given, are the effects that it had and could have had on film history. Consider: Ince, a prolific producer, was cut off at forty-two. Among his plenteous pictures was the first film of a Eugene O'Neill play, *Anna Christie*—silent, of course, but with some strengths. (I saw it in the early 1970s, sitting next to its star, the aged and amiable Blanche Sweet.) Who can know what might have lain ahead of Ince? Further: if Hearst had not been able to suppress the truth, *Citizen Kane* might never have been made or would certainly have been quite different. Then suppose that Hearst had shot the man he really wanted to kill—in 1924. The world would not have had *The Gold Rush* and *The Circus* and *City Lights* and *Modern Times*. We would not, in the looming shadow of Hitler, have been cheered by *The Great Dictator*.

The Cat's Meow reminds us that Hollywood has other unsolved mysteries, among them the death of a director named William Desmond Taylor in 1922 and the death of a lively blonde actress named Thelma Todd in 1935. There are more stories in the shadows. But possibly such stories are only to be expected in a society so overheated and so awash in prodigalities. This miasma is caught by F. Scott Fitzgerald in the two best novels about Hollywood. *The Last Tycoon*, though unfinished, is immediate and sad; the other novel is not even set in Hollywood but comprehends its essence. Whenever I read *The Great Gatsby*, which has its own mistaken murder, it seems a crystallization of Movieland.

Far removed from a film about the film world is **Triumph of Love** (Paramount Classics), which strives to put an eighteenth-century French comedy on the screen. Yet it raises the same basic question as the Bogdanovich picture: why?

Pierre Marivaux's play was revived in London several years ago, and this production inspired Clare Peploe to make a film version. Peploe once worked with Antonioni and has since written and directed on her own. She has also worked with her husband, Bernardo Bertolucci, who produced this picture. Out of all this film experience comes a work that seems to be struggling against its new form, that wants to be left in the theater. The result is a travesty *en travesti*. Like so many comedies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France and England, the plot hinges on cross-dressing—never a man posing as a woman, always a woman posing as a man.

Shakespeare used the device triumphantly in several plays, and not only in comedies. (Remember, for instance, the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*.) But he started with an advantage: all the female roles in his theater were played by boys and men. In later and lesser plays, that cross-dressing device now often grates on the nerves. This is not just because of implausibility—we can set our plausibility levels differently for such

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plays—but because most of the plots are so mechanical. We watch the setup of the circumstances and wonder just how long it will take to reveal them.

To put such a comedy on the screen, the very habitat of implacable realism, is to promise that the picture will offer something more than credibility. *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* have been filmed, and their cross-dressed heroines were tolerable up close because, in some degree, we were grateful for any medium that would let us hear what they had to say. But the language in *Triumph of Love*—adapted from Martin Crimp's translation—is like the grinding of old wooden gears. Thus unrewarded and undistracted, we are shunted back to the matter of believability; we can't credit that anyone was fooled by the disguises.

With this lumpy language and with direction that is less like art than engineering, we are left with the strivings of the plot to be light and sexy. Of that plot, I will note only that a princess disguises herself as a man in order to meet a handsome young man (awake, detectives of homosexuality). In the course of things she also meets, in amorous atmosphere, a reclusive philosopher and his scientist sister. The plot is carefully diagrammed, but that diagram is visible throughout.

Once again the performances are better than the picture that they are in. Mira Sorvino, though the male hairstyle doesn't become her, plays the princess with intelligence and a concern for style. Fiona Shaw, as the scientist, snorts and prances like a thoroughbred mare showing fettle and mettle. The best treat is Ben Kingsley as the philosopher. Kingsley takes the role seriously enough to make it fairly comic. He is not only talented but conscientious.

But a motion-picture version of this play! It is another kind of cross-dressing, only worse. ■

The Anti-American

By Ian Buruma

Power Politics
by Arundhati Roy

(South End Press, 132 pp., $40)

The Algebra of Infinite Justice
by Arundhati Roy

(Penguin Books India, 299 pp.)

Brilliant people can be remarkably obtuse. The critic and novelist John Berger declares, in his introduction to Arundhati Roy's collection of political essays, that the American war in Afghanistan is an "act of terror against the people of the world." He also states that the nineteen hijackers "gave their lives" on September 11 "as did three hundred and fifty-three Manhattan firemen," as though there were no difference between people who die to commit mass murder and those who die to save lives. And the killings in New York and Washington, Berger informs us, were "the direct result of trying to impose everywhere the new world economic order (the abstract, soaring, groundless market) which insists that man's supreme task is to make profit."

The soaring market in Algeria? The new world economic order in Sudan? Profit-making in Afghanistan? Ah, if only. There were no doubt many reasons for the suicidal murder spree at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, but global capitalism surely comes low on the list. Islamism flourishes precisely in places that are relatively or even absolutely untouched by IBM or Motorola or even, strange to say, McDonald's. If the new economic order were the problem, why didn't the terrorists come from Bangkok, or Hong Kong?

Still, John Berger is the right man to introduce Arundhati Roy's collection of political polemics. Few intellectual voices have been as ubiquitous as Roy's after September 11, and few quite so shrill. Roy is the author of *The God of Small Things*, a novel read by millions all over the world. Her articles have appeared all over the world, too, in—among other publications—*The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *El País*, and *Der Spiegel*. One reason people listen to her, apart from her literary fame, is that she has positioned herself, successfully, as an authentic Third World voice. And like Lee Kuan Yew, a very different kind of Asian voice, she is highly articulate in English, a winning combination.

Roy does not like to be called an "activist," but she has stuck her neck out for a variety of causes. Some of them, such as the protest against potentially catastrophic dam-building projects in India, are certainly worth fighting for. So for that she should be commended. Yet, at the same time, Roy has a tendency to sound preposterous. Her reaction to the events of September 11 was that we would never know what had motivated the hijackers, but that "Mickey Mouse," that is to say, the United States, was not a viable alternative to "the mullahs." (She made this pronouncement on *Nightline* on November 3, 2001.) The snobbery of her tone alone betrays the lingering, if perhaps unconscious, influence in India of British lefties from the end of the Raj. It is the language of the Bloomsbury drawing room. You could well imagine Bertrand Russell taking this line.

The question is whether Roy's preposterousness undermines the causes that she promotes. Ramachandra Guha, a well-respected scholar and writer in India, thinks that it does. In a sharp attack on Roy's political statements, published in the newspaper *The Hindu* in November 2000, Guha argued that Roy should stick to writing novels, because her vanity and her self-indulgence devalues the work of more serious activists. He mentioned as an example her efforts on behalf of the movement against the huge expensive dams in western India, which will displace hundreds of thousands of poor people. The cause is just, but Guha believes that Roy's grandstanding on its behalf, which recently earned her a well-publicized night in jail, made a spectacle of her at the expense of the anti-dam movement.

The quarrel between Roy and Guha has implications that go beyond the Indian borders. It touches upon celebrity culture, on the uses of literary fame in political causes, on the public role of the writer in a democracy, and on the intellectual roots

Ian Buruma is the author, most recently, of *Bad Elements: Chinese Rebels from Los Angeles to Beijing* (Random House).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of anti-Americanism. For these reasons alone, Roy's recent writings merit closer attention.

Arundhati Roy may have come late to the anti-dam movement, as Ramachandra Guha says, but she did so in 1999, when the movement was in poor shape. She revived flagging spirits among the activists and put their goals back in the public eye. Building huge dams has been almost a fetish of Indian governments since Nehru, who made the famous statement (later regretted) that dams were "the temples of modern India." The Hoover Dam was the original model for this kind of thing, but it was Soviet-style nationalist machismo that inspired developing countries such as India. Dams are the very models of Stakhanovite enterprise, the perfect symbols of massive modernity. The Chinese are still at it, too.

The results, as Roy has been at pains to point out, have often been disastrous. During the last fifty years, as many as fifty million mostly poor, low-caste Indians have lost their homes and livelihoods as a consequence of big dam projects. The benefits go mostly to the urban rich, while many peasants still have no access to safe drinking water. And even the benefits are often exaggerated. In the case of one big Indian dam, only five percent of the area that was promised irrigation actually received any water.

All this is bad enough, especially for the dislocated poor. There is really no need for tasteless comparisons. But Roy writes: "Shall we just put the Star of David on their doors and get it over with." It is not immediately clear what gallery she is playing to here—her essays were written for Indian readers—but the effect diminishes the power of her message.

The Sardar Sarovar plan to build 3,200 dams on the Narmada River, which runs through three states in western India, is designed to be the biggest dam project of all. Roy says that it will submerge and destroy 4,000 square kilometers of forestland, and displace hundreds of thousands of people without adequate plans for relocation or compensation. The other odd aspect of this huge irrigation scheme is that it will benefit only one of the three states, Gujarat, while the sacrifices are all to be born by villagers in the other two, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Gujarat is naturally all in favor of this, as was the World Bank, at least initially. An enterprise that began as a form of Third World mimicry of Soviet methods now finds its most vociferous defenders among free-marketeers, right-wing Hindu chauvinists in the Indian government, and Western corporations. One of the most disturbing stories in *Power Politics*, Roy's essay against the dams, is about the way Enron squeezed billions of dollars out of the state of Maharashtra for a power plant that most local industries cannot even afford to tap.

Critical studies of big dam building began to appear in India in the 1980s. The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a movement of protest specifically against the Sardar Sarovar dam, organized demonstrations and strikes through the 1980s and 1990s. Independent reports, commissioned by the Indian government as well as by the World Bank and the World Conservation Union, were highly critical of the dam, for environmental reasons as well as social reasons, and after much pressure from activists the World Bank withdrew its support. Still, the Indian Supreme Court, after being petitioned by the NBA, decided to let the project go ahead anyway.

Anti-dam activists, including Roy, were smeared in the pro-government press as traitors, and accused of assaulting a group of lawyers at the Supreme Court. There was no evidence for this, but the case went to court, and Roy wrote in her affidavit that this showed "a disquieting inclination on the part of the court to silence criticism and muzzle dissent." As a result, she was charged with contempt of court, spent her night in jail, and paid a fine. Unwise, perhaps; but more people read about the dam problem because of her than would otherwise have been the case.

When Roy got involved in the anti-dam movement, she was already a famous writer. But it was not her first brush with organized protest. Her mother, Mary Roy, is a well-known promoter of women's rights in India, so Arundhati imbibed dissent with her mother's milk. But she is also rather melodramatic about the public role of the writer. To be a writer, she says, "in a country that gave the world Mahatma Gandhi ... is a ferocious burden." Quite where Gandhi fits in is unclear. Still, Roy writes about politics not as a famous novelist, but as a citizen, "only a citizen, one of many, asking for a public explanation." She has no "personal or ideological axe to grind." She has no "professional stakes to protect." It is simply "time to snatch our futures back from the 'experts.'"

There is nothing wrong with this. Experts are fallible. Famous novelists are citizens, too. But there is in fact something professional at stake here. For Roy goes further than saying that a writer should use her fame to promote worthy causes. She believes that what "is happening in the world lies, at the moment, just outside the realm of human understanding." But help is at hand: it is "the writers, the poets, the artists, the singers, the filmmakers who can make the connections, who can find ways of bringing it into the realm of common understanding." Some of the reactions among the writers, the poets, and the artists to the events of last September make this kind of special pleading less than convincing.

Roy's efforts on behalf of the victims of dam-building show her to be a good citizen; but if her aim, as a writer of political essays, is to promote common understanding, she is less than a success. The essays express her convictions and her prejudices with great passion, but by her

Arundhati Roy by Zach Trenholm for The New Republic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own account she aims higher. Roy wants language to cut through platitudes and lies: "As a writer, one spends a lifetime journeying into the heart of language, trying to minimize, if not eliminate, the distance between language and thought. 'Language is the skin of my thought,' I remember saying to someone who once asked what language meant to me." If so, her thoughts could do with a course of Clearasil.

Roy showed a fondness in her novel for overlush imagery and showy stylistic flourishes. The same thing is true in her essays, where her literary mannerisms often obscure understanding. The text is pockmarked with flip haiku-like clichés of the following kind: "My world has died. And I write to mourn its passing." (This is about India's development of the nuclear bomb.) Or this tired old dictum: "One country's terrorist is too often another's freedom fighter." There is also the constant hyperbole, which actually weakens the power of language. Privatization, Roy writes, is a "process of barbaric dispossession on a scale that has few parallels in history." Really? On the same topic: "What is happening to our world is almost too colossal for human comprehension to contain. But it is a terrible, terrible thing." Well, perhaps it is, but this judgment does little to help my own human comprehension of international economics. And if we are really dealing with matters outside human understanding, then human reason is obviously an inadequate tool, so why bother to write an essay at all?

It doesn't help either that Roy adopts the patronizing tone of a tour guide for schoolchildren: "Allow me to shake your faith. Put your hand in mine and let me lead you through the maze." And her attempts to find a literary expression for her contempt of American capitalism are equally childish. America is likened to Rumpelstiltskin with "a bank account heart" and "television eyes" and a "Surround Sound stereo mouth which amplifies his voice and filters out the sound of the rest of the world, so that you can't hear it even when it's shouting (or starving or dying) and King Rumpel is only whispering, rolling his r's in his North American way."

IN THE END, though, how much does it really matter? Does Roy's style really do as much damage to the substance of her cause as Ramachandra Guha thinks? In the case of the Sardar Sarovar dam, the merits of her involvement surely outweigh the limitations of her prose or the manner of her public presentation. The cause is clear enough. There are many more sober, more scholarly, more considered books and articles to read, for those who take a serious interest in the matter. And for those who would rather not be bothered, such as millions of Indian voters, Roy's passionate advocacy at least brings it to their attention.

But when Roy attempts to tackle a wider world, fulminating against the American intervention in Afghanistan, or against "globalization," her tone and her stylistic tics become more than irritating. Her demonology of the United States takes on the foaming-at-the-mouth, eye-rolling quality of the mad evangelist. Unfortunately, it is this side of her, and not the campaigning against dam projects, that has found a worldwide audience. Roy has become the perfect Third World voice for anti-American, or anti-Western, or even anti-white, sentiments. Those are sentiments dear to the hearts of intellectuals everywhere, including the United States itself.

The litany is well-known. America is the most belligerent power on earth. Its government is committed to "military and economic terrorism, insurgency, military dictatorship, religious bigotry and unimaginable genocide (*outside* America)." The economic policies of the United States, otherwise known as globalization or imperialism, are "merciless" and rapacious, destroying economies "like a cloud of locusts." This means, in Roy's view, that "any Third World country with a fragile economy and a complex social base should know by now that to invite a superpower like America in ... would be like inviting a brick to drop through your windscreen." This rather ignores the historical fact that it is precisely America's old "client states" in East and Southeast Asia—South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan—that have done rather well, politically and economically. South Vietnam, had it remained under American patronage, would no doubt have been among them.

If American economic imperialism is bad, American militarism is worse. Not only is America responsible for the deaths of millions in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Central America, but also, according to Roy's account, in ... Yugoslavia! So the belated American intervention, which saved countless Bosnian and Albanian Kosovar lives, is now also a part of America's bellicose record. Rumpelstiltskin's empire is an evil, evil place. To drive this home, Roy uses the usual tricks of the demagogue. One of those tricks is the misleading quotation. The other is what used to be called, in Cold War days, moral equivalence.

One quotation pops up in many an anti-American diatribe, including Roy's. This is the way she reports it: "In 1996, Madeleine Albright ... was asked on national television what she felt about the fact that five hundred thousand Iraqi children had died as a result of U.S. economic sanctions. She replied that it was 'a very hard choice,' but that all things considered, 'we think the price is worth it.'" This sounds pretty horrible. In fact, Albright had already made it clear to Lesley Stahl of CBS, who asked the question, that the Iraqi children were not dying because of the sanctions. Iraq can buy as much medicine as it wants. She admitted that sanctions did have negative consequences, but she argued that this was a price worth paying for containing the threat posed by Saddam Hussein.

The moral-equivalence argument is crudely employed. Terrorism, Roy writes, is "as global an enterprise as Coke or Pepsi or Nike." Terrorists move their "factories" from country to country "in search of a better deal. Just like the multinationals." This is true, as far as it goes, but the business of Pepsi is not exactly mass murder. The terrorists, Roy goes on to say, are "the ghosts of the victims of America's old wars." Osama bin Laden is "the American President's dark doppelgänger," and "the twins are blurring into one another and gradually becoming interchangeable.... Both are engaged in unequivocal political crimes. Both are dangerously armed...." And so on and so forth. One gets the drift.

NOW WHY WOULD an Indian novelist get so overwrought about the United States? And she is not the only writer to do so. Consider Harold Pinter's description of America in the latest issue of *Granta* magazine: "The 'rogue state' has—without thought, without pause for reflection, without a moment of doubt, let alone shame—confirmed that it is a fully-fledged, award-winning, gold-plated monster."

For a start, it must be said that American corporations—Enron being just one instance—have not always played a pretty role in India. Union Carbide's involvement in the Bhopal gas leak in 1984, which killed more than ten thousand people, was horrendous. And American foreign policy, especially its support of Pakistan during the Bangladesh war, has distressed many Indians. Indeed, over-sensitive though Indians may sometimes be to slights (or imagined slights) from Western powers, Washington has not done nearly enough over the years to cultivate goodwill in Asia's biggest democracy. But there must be more to Roy's rage. For, in fact, American corporations have played a fairly minor role in postwar India, compared to many other parts of Asia.

There is one verbal tic that keeps

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recurring in Roy's writings that may help us to understand her feelings—for that is what they are, more than coherent thoughts. She refers a great deal to India's "ancient civilization," usually to show how humiliating it is for an ancient people to defer to a jumped-up, uncivilized place such as the United States. About President Clinton's visit to India, she observes: "He was courted and fawned over by the genuflecting representatives of this ancient civilization with a fervour that can only be described as indecent." This speaks of the same snobbery that informed Roy's remark on American television about Mickey Mouse and the mullahs.

Rich, rampant America shows up the relative weakness and backwardness of India. This is hard to take for a member of the intellectual or artistic elite, educated by nationalist professors, whose thoughts were often molded by British Marxists from the London School of Economics. The genuine popularity of American pop culture among the urban masses in India makes the elite feel marginal in their own country, which sharpens their sense of pique. For India, you could also read France, Italy, Japan, or even China. Thus Roy's voice is less representative of the Third World than of a global intelligentsia, floating from conference to conference, moaning about the effects of globalization.

Being more civilized, wiser, older, and more spiritual is the last wall of defense against superior power. Again, about September 11, describing the reaction in the supposedly more civilized parts of the world, Roy notes "the tired wisdom of knowing that what goes around, eventually comes around." How could the callow denizens of the New World ever match such ancient understanding? Since many American intellectuals, be they novelists or academics, share Roy's contempt for American pop culture and the vulgar patriotism of the American media, some are inclined to applaud her sentiments. This in itself would be of little consequence, were it not that better informed, more intelligent criticism of American policies, foreign and domestic, is needed more than ever.

Arundhati Roy's overheated prose gives criticism a bad name. She makes it too easy for unthinking patriots to dismiss any foreign skepticism toward American policy as mere envy or prejudice. And the effect of her voice in the non-Western world might be worse. The Iraqi intellectual dissident Kanan Makiya observed in his book *Cruelty and Silence* that Edward Said's *Orientalism* contributed to a pervasive lack of a sense of responsibility among young Arab intellectuals for the problems of the Middle East. If everything is the fault of a supposedly omnipotent America, or of ingrained Western colonial attitudes, then there is nothing to be done at home, except lash out in a rage.

Roy is someone who has taken responsibility for problems in her own country. There her anger found a target in a concrete cause. In the wider world, however, it gets dissipated in hot air and petulance. The simple-minded demonization of the American monster is pure Occidentalism, or Said in reverse, which only helps to undermine the political self-scrutiny without which a democracy cannot work, or, more to the point, without which an authoritarian society cannot become a democratic one. This cannot be what Roy set out to accomplish. ■

The extravagant divisions of Isaac Babel.

The Right to Write Badly

By IRVING HOWE

SPEAK THE NAME of Isaac Babel and one phrase comes insistently to mind: a writer of genius. But what we might mean by "genius" is not easy to say. William Hazlitt wrote that "the definition of genius is that it acts unconsciously," by which I take him to mean that genius is a gift pouring through the writer—pouring through because it seems to come not merely from his own creative resources but from somewhere else. (Kafka: "There is a higher power that wishes to use me.") In the case of Babel this gift is not nearly so abundant as in, say, Keats or Proust; it is narrow in scope, tensely packed, austerely situated. Babel's career as a literary craftsman was spent in the hard labor of endless revision, a subtle refining and compressing of violent effects. Yet what strikes one first and last is the glow of a great natural talent, a blessing bestowed. And for all his hard labor, Babel's art is finally an art of risk: either success or failure, with no space for modesty.

Born in 1894 in Odessa, a port city of southern Russia, Babel came to maturity at about the time of the Russian Revolution. In the 1920s he gained a reputation as an important Soviet writer, in part through a cycle of Odessa stories, thickly colored, farcical tales of Jewish gangsters, and in part through a sequence of stories and sketches called *Red Cavalry* (1926), set in the now-forgotten Russian-Polish war of 1920 as seen through the eyes of a Jewish intellectual, pacific and melancholy, "with glasses on [his] nose and autumn in [his] soul," largely, one surmises, a version of Babel himself. Mainly through a mastery of silence Babel survived the opening years of Stalinist terror until his arrest by the secret police in May, 1939. Exactly why he was arrested we do not know; in those terrible years there often was no "why." Interrogation and apparently torture followed, then a secret "trial" and execution in January 1940. For many years afterward, the exact circumstances of Babel's death remained unknown, but as a mercy of glasnost reports about his last days began to appear in Soviet periodicals.

Babel was raised in a lower-middle-class Jewish family wavering between religious habits and secular inclinations. In those years Odessa was an especially lively city containing within itself the social tensions and clashing ideas of prerevolutionary Russia, and in the stories of his childhood Babel brings together a wild mixture, almost a fantasia, of motifs: Jewish fears of pogroms, the pressures of burgeoning sexuality, an early liking for Western culture, an admiration for plebeian rowdies. Nor does he try, through will or formula, to bind these motifs into harmony. Harmony would never be, for him, a major desire.

In the stories about Benya Krik, the stylish Jewish gangster reigning as "king" of the poor Odessa neighborhood called the Moldavanka, the tone is charmingly buoyant and frequently mock-heroic. Benya, after all, is no more than a small-time thug, but when elevated to local legend he comes to represent amoral pleasures and energies which the bookish Jewish narrator wistfully aspires to. This narrator (see the brilliant story "How It Was Done in Odessa") tries to ferret out the secret of Benya's personal

IRVING HOWE died in 1993. This essay was written in 1989–1990 as an introduction to a collection of Isaac Babel's writings and is published here for the first time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

authority, but all he can do is stare from a distance.

The Benya Krik stories bear an aura of extravaganza, of playful excess, somewhat like a comic opera; and indeed, when reading them one recalls John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, and perhaps also Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, both nose-thumbers at respectability. In one of Babel's stories Benya Krik, delivering a funeral oration over a poor clerk "accidentally" killed during a holdup, grandly declares the victim to have "died for the whole working class"—whereupon the piece comes to a gloriously absurd climax as "the sun stands to attention over [Benya's] head like a sentry with a rifle." In Yiddish fiction of the early twentieth century, there is a similar fondness for rowdies, even thieves, as figures of social combativeness overcoming traditional Jewish passivity and fear. Whether Babel was familiar with these writings I do not know; but he certainly knew Yiddish.

About his early years Babel writes in an abbreviated "Autobiography":

> I was born ... the son of a tradesman Jew. On father's insistence, I studied Hebrew, the Bible, the Talmud, till the age of sixteen. Life at home was hard because I was forced to study a multitude of subjects. Resting I did at school.

Babel's Jewish upbringing left upon much of his work a stamp of affectionate irony, sometimes embarrassed nostalgia. In a number of stories it seems to me that one can detect a sly rendering of Yiddish speech melody, a sort of vibration of inheritance, beneath the surface of the prose. The early piece "Shabos Nakhuma," a slender folk-like anecdote, reads like an apprentice mimicry of Sholom Aleichem.

By 1915, BABEL made his way to Petrograd, living as a bohemian and trying to get his early writings into print. He submitted a few stories to Maxim Gorky, then a famous writer, and the generous older man quickly recognized Babel's large, still unformed talent. That Gorky published these pieces in the newspaper he edited, Babel would later recall, was a crucial event in his life. Then, between 1917 and 1924, "I served as a soldier at the Romanian front, in the Cheka [as a clerk in the Bolshevik secret police], in the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment ... in the First Cavalry Army [with the Cossacks during the Russo-Polish war].... And only in 1923 did I learn to express my thoughts clearly and concisely. Then I once again began to compose fiction."

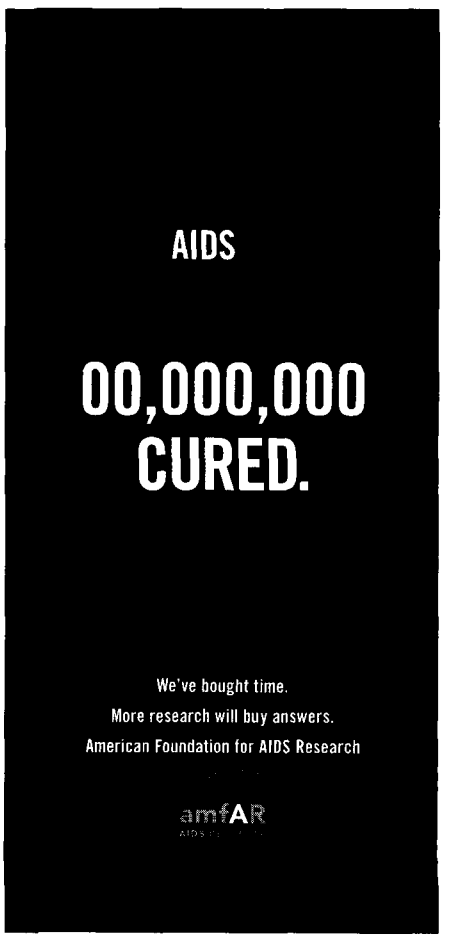
By the mid-1920s Babel had become a central figure in the ill-fated generation of modernist Russian writers who for a time hoped to strike a truce with the Bolshevik regime; later almost all of them suffered from the cultural despotism, often the sheer brutality, of the Stalin dictatorship. Babel's work in those years can be seen in part as a fulfillment of the critical program advanced by the Soviet writer Evgeny Zamyatin in a dazzling essay called "Literature, Revolution, and Entropy": a clenched blow of narrative, a repressed turmoil of emotion, a wounding entanglement with history, a rejection of familiar answers. But together with the literary persona who employs devices of shock, enigma, and compression, there is another Babel, a "natural" storyteller, the literary grandson of the Yiddish masters Mendele Mokher Sforim and Sholom Aleichem. This Babel speaks with relaxed guile, a friendly grin, even now and then a few words of tenderness.

It is *Red Cavalry* that is Babel's major achievement, one that immediately thrust him into the front rank of twentieth-century literature. *Red Cavalry* strikes me as, in the literal sense, a terrible book, one that sends tremors of pain through the heart. It is also a book rarely settled or comforting in its moral stance, always stopping before or stalled at puzzlements and quandaries. The usual paraphernalia of literature are stripped away: no expository preparation, no firm authorial guidance, no delicate psychological analysis, no hankering after philosophical depths. All comes across as a brilliant glare of surface, with repeated climaxes of action that are preceded sometimes by brief colorings of imagery and sometimes by a brief calming of voice.

The narrator of *Red Cavalry*—he is the same fellow we met before, glasses on his nose, autumn in his soul—is attached to a Cossack unit in the Bolshevik campaign against Poland in 1920. Babel's actual experience lies behind these stories, but he is also drawing upon a literary tradition celebrating the primitive graces of the Cossacks. In Tolstoy's romantic-pastoral novella *The Cossacks*, a nervous young man from Moscow who has settled for a time with a Cossack community learns to value its "natural" ways of living, its freedom from pretension, snobbism, and anxiety. Babel's Cossacks are drawn in harsher tones and darker colors than Tolstoy's, since Babel could hardly have forgotten how strongly Russian Jews feared the Cossacks, often participants in pogroms. (See the story "First Love.")

In a diary in 1920, Babel wrote: "What is our Cossack? Layers of trashiness, daring, professionalism, revolutionary spirit, bestial cruelty." But, he added, the Cossacks exhibit "an awesome force," an "unutterable beauty," and have "a gift for magnificent comradeship." Like Tolstoy before him, Babel admired the Cossacks' ease of movement, their ready acceptance of inherited modes of life, their distance from the traumas of modern consciousness—so strikingly different from the ghetto Jews who "moved jerkily, in an uncontrolled and uncouth way." But finally—if one can ever speak of anything final in Babel's work—he is torn in his feelings about the Cossacks: he does not quite yield to a myth of the noble savage, he recognizes the Cossacks' wanton brutality, he must live with the Odessa self-consciousness that is his lot.

In *Red Cavalry*, primitive Cossack ways jostle against the unhealed consciousness of the narrator. (What shall we call this narrator? Lyutov, the name that he reveals only about halfway through the book? Or Babel, the voice behind Lyutov? For simplicity's sake I opt for Babel, while aware that the Babel who appears in the stories is not quite the same and in some instances very different from the writer named Isaac Babel.) The random brutality that is a heritage of centuries seems now, through an act of revolutionary will, to be lifted toward a selfless red heroism; but this soon succumbs to the old brutality surviv-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing into the present. Extremes of behavior, weaving into one another as if to spite moralists, bewilder the narrator. They bewilder us, too. Nothing in *Red Cavalry* is fully resolved; contraries battle one another into the last page; wounds remain bloody.

BABEL THE WRITER was drawn to violence, its decisiveness, its absoluteness. This may partly have formed a personal inclination which it would be presumptuous to explain by long-distance psychology. But it was also, perhaps mainly, a response that he shared with many younger Jews of his time who, in seeking a revolution of posture among themselves, felt that only forcible resistance could halt the repeated attacks upon their people. There is enough evidence in Babel's writings and letters to make clear that personally he also detested the violence to which as a writer he was drawn. Ambivalence—that may be too mild a word—glares out of his pages, the sign of clashing sentiments and desires. He lived intimately with division; he had no other home. And this division derived from sources deeper than any views he may have held about the events of his time. It betokened a kind of imaginative largesse, a generosity of response toward all those who were forced to endure the blows of history—Cossacks, Hasids, commissars, old women trapped in war. If he seems at times to be a partisan in thought, he was free of bias regarding all who suffered.

What can be said with some assurance is that he also felt a strong need to identify himself, even as he kept an uneasy distance from a powerful current of history: the rebellion surging through Russia in 1917. He belonged to no party, he was not an ideological man, and in his later years he must surely have had caustic judgments about Stalinism. But during the decade after the revolution, when he did most of his best work, it seemed to Babel, as it seemed to other Russian writers not necessarily sympathetic to Bolshevism, that Russia was experiencing another of its recurrent waves of primal upheaval. In such a moment violence seemed inescapable, violence as the spur of history. Enough time has passed in which to form critical judgments of such attitudes; but if we are to read Babel and many other gifted Russian writers of the 1920s, such as Mayakovsky and Pilnyak, we must find in ourselves the historical imagination to grasp the shattering circumstances in which they wrote. We have to see, if we cannot share; we have to read *as if* we see what they were experiencing.

The stabbing conflicts of feeling and value all this induced in Babel form the central theme of *Red Cavalry*. Glance at "My First Goose," one of his marvelous little stories, where the narrator, joining a Cossack squadron, suffers a rude hazing—immediately the Cossacks see he is not one of them—until, desperate to show himself worthy of their esteem, he orders the woman in whose house they are quartered to cook him something to eat. "Comrade," she replies (it is unforgettable), "all this makes me want to hang myself." A few lines later she repeats her remark. What she says serves as a moral counter to both the Cossacks and the narrator; indeed, it comes to seem a choral plaint for the whole of humanity. Lyutov-Babel kills a goose and forces the woman to cook it for him. Admiring this show of toughness or, as they would regard it, manliness (one of them grins, "The lad seems all right"), the Cossacks welcome "the lad" to their circle, and in return he reads them a speech of Lenin's "in the loud voice of one defiantly deaf." The story ends:

> After that we went to bed in the hay-loft. There were six of us sleeping there, keeping each other warm, with our legs entangled, under a roof full of holes that let in the starlight. I dreamt, and there were women in my dreams, but my heart, my scarlet murderer's heart, creaked and bled.

It is an astonishing ending. The narrator's legs become "entangled" with those of the Cossacks in a fraternity of sleep, but he judges himself to be a "scarlet murderer" unfaithful to his true self, for in his heart he is a man of peace. And like a rasp of communal grief, there is the voice of the woman: "Comrade, all this makes me want to hang myself."

RED CAVALRY TURNS upon Babel's struggle with a problem that must trouble any writer of fiction who deals with political life: the problem of historical action in both its (perhaps) heroic necessity and its all-but-certain self-contamination; that is, the flaw at the heart of an action that by virtue of being in history must to some extent be conceived in violence and thereby end as a denial of itself. This problem, for Babel, is not at all a metaphysical exercise. It forms the very center of his work.

Some of the most powerful stories in *Red Cavalry* turn against the narrator himself, harsh attacks upon his inability to kill other men and sometimes his feckless attempts to mimic the ways of those who do know how to kill. The Jewish literary man needs to prove to himself that, given the historical necessity, he can commit acts which for the Cossacks seem second nature. Does Babel sentimentalize the Cossacks here? By and large, I would say no. He remains in a state of awe before the ancient mysteries of their ways, but he realizes that finally he can neither understand nor join them. What makes these quivering little stories so remarkable is that Babel knows he must grant cogency and force to all sides in the conflicts he depicts, but especially he must not allow the Cossacks to be either romanticized or devalued by the narrator's judgments. The stories live through inner opposition.

In a brilliant five-page story called "The Death of Dolgushov," a wounded Cossack, his entrails hanging over his knees, begs the narrator to shoot him, but, soft and scrupulous, the narrator funks it. A comrade of the wounded man does the job and then turns upon Lyutov-Babel in a fury: "You guys in glasses have about as

For the Cosmonauts

We have all floated between two worlds,
orbiting at dawn's precise tangent

in a capsule held static
between life and the black eye of heaven.

From the cosmonauts we learned
our pulse-checking patience, joy of small coffee,

necessary omission of guilt. After a short night
we awake sunlit in sunlight, the station

witnessing that it is always sunrise somewhere.
We carry on, waiting to be called home,

shielding our bleary eyes from the sun.
Soon the new day will come. For now

we watch, await signals, judge and respond.
Boldly the Earth tightens its tether

and the cold cracks the glass with ice.
Now the distance and difference

between us and the world, this measured space,
is the same shade as vodka, vodka, vodka.

Evan Rail

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much pity for chaps like us as a cat has for a mouse." The moral stress here is clearly in favor of the Cossacks, who feel, with some justice, that the sensibilities of the intellectual keep him from doing a terrible thing which is nonetheless the humane and necessary thing. In another five-page masterpiece, "After the Battle," a Cossack curses the narrator for having ridden into battle with an unloaded revolver ("You didn't put no cartridges in.... You worship God, you traitor") and Lyutov-Babel goes off "imploring fate to grant me the simplest of proficiencies—the ability to kill my fellow-men." And at the end of *Red Cavalry* another Cossack pronounces upon the narrator a primitive judgment—"You're trying to live without enemies. That's all you think about, not having enemies." Ironies twist against ironies; there is no haven of assurance, no comfort of resolution.

FOR A COUNTERFORCE to the Cossacks Babel looks to the Polish Jews, squatting in their villages, impervious to the clamor for blood, as opposing armies trample back and forth. Even as he joins the Red Army, Lyutov-Babel listens with a child's attentiveness to Gedali, the Hasid who believes that "the Revolution means joy" and wants "an International of good people." Gedali would like "every soul" to be given "first-category rations. There, soul, please eat and enjoy life's pleasures. Pan comrade, you don't know what the International is eaten with...." To which our Lyutov-Babel replies: "It is eaten with gunpowder and spiced with best quality blood." This seems a dubious touch of bravado, but the story as a whole still leans toward a pacific ethos.

The Jews of Poland, with their "long bony backs, their tragic yellow beards," pierce the taut objectivity of Babel's stories, stirring in him a riot of memories, the flow of lyricism with which "Gedali" opens:

> On Sabbath eve sad memories hang heavy on me. On Sabbath eve in days gone by my grandfather's yellow beard would be brushing Ibn-Ezra's heavy volumes. My grandmother in a lace cap would be making mysterious signs with her gnarled fingers over the Sabbath candle and softly weeping. My childish heart was rocked on such evenings like a little boat on enchanted waves. Oh, the mouldering Talmud of my childhood! Oh, the heavy sadness of memories!

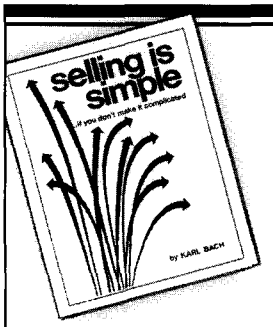
Back and forth the narrator goes from the Cossacks, strange, cruel, and beautiful, to the Jews, "who moved jerkily... but whose capacity for suffering was full of a sombre greatness...."

If *Red Cavalry* is a paean, ardent but ambiguous, to the force of revolution as realized in the bravery of the Cossacks, it is also an elegy for "the Sabbath peace [which] rested upon the crazy roofs of Zhitomer." Nor is there any way to tell—at least I cannot tell—which of these conflicting responses is to be taken as dominant, for they vary in stress from story to story, like the emotions of a man caught in a maelstrom from which he cannot, perhaps does not even wish to, escape. *Red Cavalry* offers no resolved judgment to be wrapped into a neat sentence; its "meanings" reside not only in the individual stories but in their interactions, balancing one another in parallel and opposition. There is a lovely little story in which all the conflicting pressures of desire and belief are settled, for a moment, upon a child. Two sets of believers fight over a baby named Karl-Yankel, half-Marxist, half-Jew. Watching this tragic-comic struggle, the narrator allows himself a wistful reflection: "It's not possible ... it's not possible that you won't be happy, Karl-Yankel. It's not possible that you won't be happier than I."

The conflicts that course through Babel's stories prompt one to reflect upon the relation between literature and history. The very historical action that can lend urgency to a literary work can also, after a time, cause it to sink into a blur of the forgotten. In fictions with a strong historical content, images of persons and places are vividly cast up and then, as time passes, are cast away. Such images are far removed from the "eternal" motifs that some readers like to regard as the true substance of literature. Perhaps these readers are right: finally literature draws upon a small number of recurrent stories and motifs; but sometimes the writer's imagination is fired not by a wish to transcend history but by a need to "capture" it, or by a wish to serve, at whatever cost, as a witness to his time.

In an essay about Babel written in the 1950s, the distinguished critic Lionel Trilling elevated the problem of literature and history to a sort of timeless dialectic. "In Babel's stories," he wrote, "there was a kind of fighting—he was captivated by the vision of two ways of being, the way of violence and the way of peace, and he was torn between them." Commenting on Trilling's comment, I wrote a few years later:

> True as this is, I think it misses the center of Babel's concern, which was not so much the choice between "two ways of being" open to men in almost



The most important book about salesmanship ever written ...

Selling is Simple...

by Karl Bach only $19.95*

**But read this ad for an even better deal!*

Karl Bach was a penniless and uneducated German-Jewish immigrant. He spoke very little English and, to top it off, he had a physical impediment. Not being able to get any other job, he enlisted as a Fuller Brush salesman. Within two months, he became the most productive salesman Fuller had ever had. From a standing start, he had developed irresistible sales techniques. He applied those methods and insights to the life insurance business. Within three years, he became one of the most successful life insurance producers in the US. He founded and became principal owner of the San Francisco Life Insurance Company, which eventually merged with the Philadelphia Life Insurance Company. He became a very, very wealthy man. In this book, Karl reveals his enormously successful salesmanship methods.

If you are in any area of selling, you should be able to at least quadruple your performance by reading this groundbreaking book and following its precepts. There is no reason why you shouldn't be as successful as Karl Bach -- you have so much more going for yourself than he did. We are the publishers of this book and can offer it for only **$19.95**. ***But we have an even better deal:** *Buy two books for $39.90 and we will send you a third one, with our compliments -- absolutely* FREE! If you are in any area of sales and want to multiply your performance and your income, you owe it to yourself to buy this book. You and your family will be glad you did. Order it today!

Order directly from the publisher by toll-free phone (800) 600-2777, by fax (415) 356-7804, or by mail. Mention order code **1094Y295** and give Visa/MC # and expiration date, or send check for $19.95. Add $4.95 shipping/insurance, plus sales tax for CA delivery. 30 days refund/return, except for shipping/insurance.

advance books
division of jomira/advance
470 Third St., #211, San Francisco, CA 94107

Order by toll-free phone: (800) 600-2777 or (fastest!) by fax: (415) 356-7804
Visit our website at www.haverhills.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any circumstances, but, rather, the unbearable—unbearable because felt to be entirely necessary—difficulties of being an artist committed to the fate of a desperate revolution.

In the years that Trilling and I wrote, serious people could still give credence to the high claims of the Russian Revolution or could at least remember that they had once given such credence. But now, with the collapse of Communism, it is much harder to enter fully into the positive association Babel made with the revolution. A process of historical erosion has occurred, and in consequence it may be that Trilling's ahistorical approach ("two ways of being") serves *Red Cavalry* more persuasively than my own insistence upon seeing the stories as being utterly entangled with the historical events and attitudes of its moment.

But if we now incline to look with a cool eye upon Babel's response to the Russian Revolution, can we still share the intensity and the excitement animating *Red Cavalry*? Can we still, with Babel, admire not only the red Cossacks and the Hasid Gedali, but even the steely commissars who appear now and then in the stories? Or if not admire, then see them as agents of a serious historical option?

I have no simple answers. We now read Babel's stories from a greater emotional distance than did many people several decades ago, no doubt also with a keener sense of irony and weariness (not that Babel himself didn't have his share of irony and weariness!). Since, however, we are dealing here with a writer of large gifts and deep seriousness, we can, at least while reading his stories, be lured imaginatively, perhaps even against our will, into the perspective from which he wrote. We need not agree with the opinions we may suppose to lie behind Babel's stories, we need only yield assent to struggles of mind informing what he has written.

Let me now pose another problem: Can one really speak of *Red Cavalry* as a sustained narrative? Only, I would say, in a very special sense. The historical line of action upon which the stories depend is only now and then visible in the writing itself; there is an implied, an unseen, narrative of which the stories are, so to say, the visible climaxes. Or put another way: we infer a coherent action in *Red Cavalry* somewhat in the way that, gazing upon a Pointillist painting, we also "see" a naturalist setting.

The structural unit in most of the stories is the anecdote—but the anecdote wrenched out of traditional settings and yanked into modernism. As a fictional form, the anecdote flourishes in the nineteenth century among writers employing pre-urban settings—Leskov's provincial Russia, Mark Twain's Mississippi village, Sholom Aleichem's shtetl. Collective memories and myths can still be transmitted in such societies, a present from one generation to the next. Time is abundant. Tempo is leisurely. No one expects functional "economy" of narrative. Voices wander freely, almost abandoned to mere association. Providing a brief, unelaborated, sometimes humorous account of an incident, the anecdote takes on a significance that it had not at first seemed to command.

In Babel's work the anecdote is also brief, unelaborated, sometimes humorous—yet quite different. A Babel story consists of a climax, ripped out of its narrative context, which, it is assumed, the reader can provide on his or her own. And what counts most is the writer's voice, wry, stringent, now and then flaring into eloquence. Babel organizes his stories through a process that might be called crystallization—cutting away every superfluity and tensing conflicts to the point where they must burst out. One can hardly speak of characterization: the briefly seen figures matter as agents of incident. All depends on a moment of action, and then Babel may allow himself a paragraph or two of diminution. In Zamyatin's essay, there are notes about style that seem to fit Babel:

> The old, slow soporific descriptions are no more. The order of the day is laconicism—but every word must be supercharged, high voltage. Into one second must be compressed what formerly went into a sixty-second minute. Syntax becomes elliptical, volatile; complicated pyramids of periods are dismantled and broken down into the single stone of independent clauses....

Those of us who lack Russian must be circumspect when talking about Babel's style. Still, a few remarks may be ventured. In his stories the turmoil of violence can yield abruptly to a milky quietness. Objectivity seems the dominant mode, yet few prose writers would dare indulge in such lyrical apostrophes as recur in Babel's pages. It is commonly supposed that terseness and understatement go together, but not in Babel. Terse his stories are, but rarely are they understated. One moves with dizzying speed from abstraction to specific notation: surprise upon surprise. In some stories there is a surrender to reflective sadness as complete as the rush to violence in others. In still others the crucial event is hidden, with the surface of the prose nothing more than a few ripples of talk. Speech inflicts wounds.

Babel composed frugally. Much of what he wrote during the 1930s he did not publish, composing, as they used to say in Soviet Russia, "for the drawer." In 1934, Babel made one of his rare public appearances, at a Soviet Writers' Congress. He said that he practiced a new literary genre: he was a "master of the genre of silence." In the midst of routine praise for the Party, he remarked as if in passing that it presumed to deprive writers of only one right, the right to write badly. "Comrades, let us not fool ourselves; this is a very important right and to take it away is no small thing...."

The right to write badly—to write from one's own feelings, to make one's own mistakes—it would be hard to imagine a sadder or more courageous word. Babel suffered no immediate punishment, other than the silence he imposed on himself; but from a few passages that can be culled from the letters he wrote to his wife, his mother, and his sister, all of whom had emigrated to Western Europe, we can gain some idea of what he thought and felt:

> 1925: Like everyone else in my profession, I am oppressed by the prevailing conditions of our work in Moscow; that is, we are seething in a sickening professional environment devoid of art or creative freedom. [In a few years he will not dare to write so openly.]
>
> 1928 [from Kiev]: There's poverty here, much that is sad, but it is my material, my language, something that is of direct interest to me.... I don't mind going abroad on vacation but I must work here.
>
> 1930: As for the apparent misfortune of my literary life, up till now I have brilliantly allayed the fears of my short-sighted admirers and it will be the same in the future. I am made of a dough that is a mixture of stubbornness and patience and it is only when these two elements are strained to the utmost that *la joie de vivre* comes over me....
>
> 1936: *Akademia* has entrusted me with the editing of Sholom Aleichem's works. I read him in my spare hours and roll around with laughter: it brings my young years back to me.
>
> 1937: I have spent a few days in town attending stormy literary meetings, the gravity of which you know from the newspapers. Their beneficent effects upon the future are beyond doubt but in the meantime it keeps breaking one's writing rhythms. [Babel had not lost his gift for irony.]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

About Babel's writings during the last several years of his life it is all but impossible to form a judgment. Manuscripts confiscated by the secret police remain unavailable, perhaps destroyed. From the few short pieces and fragments of novels that we do have, it seems that Babel was grappling toward new modes, styles, and subjects. I think the Jewish side of his experience was coming through more strongly than in earlier years, but about this we can do little more than speculate.

Every sympathetic reader of Babel is likely to wonder whether at some moment in his later years he succeeded in moving beyond the relentless inner divisions of historical sensibility that grip his stories. The question is an urgent one, and not only with regard to Babel himself, yet it cannot be answered with assurance. Bluntly put: how long could a writer continue to live with the rending oppositions that inform Babel's work? I think that in some of his stories there are signs of a movement toward a plateau of moral balance, calmer and more contemplative than one finds in most of his work—though not necessarily making for a greater achievement.

These signs of change, admittedly slight, suggest that he may have begun distancing himself from the pressures of his own mind. One might suppose that the mature Babel, knowing he had done as much as he could in the line of modernist brilliance, would have reached a moral ground somewhat beyond the brutal conflicts of his historical moment. But we don't really know. The history that brought tension to his stories also brought death. The Babel we know is impaled on the agonies of our century, and perhaps that is where he would have chosen to stay. Ripeness was not to be his fate.

Babel was only forty-five when he was murdered. Thinking of his end, one feels again a helpless rage before the destruction Stalinism wrought upon a whole generation of gifted writers. Maxim Gorky had warned Babel: "A writer's way is littered with nails, mostly large ones, and he has to walk on them barefoot. He will bleed profusely, and more and more every year." ■

Pillar of Ire

By JUSTIN DRIVER

Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual by Jerry Gafio Watts

(New York University Press, 570 pp., $37.95)

I.

IN 1990, AMIRI BARAKA was denied tenure by the English department of Rutgers University. An aging polemicist unable to find a publisher for his recent work, Baraka was hardly a promising academic with a bright future ahead of him. But instead of taking the rejection in stride, he characteristically decided to fight the decision, and spewed vitriol at the tenure committee. "The power of these Ivy League Goebbels can flaunt, dismiss, intimidate and defraud the popular will," Baraka charged. "We must unmask these powerful Klansmen. These enemies of academic freedom, people's democracy and Pan American culture must not be allowed to prevail. Their intellectual presence makes a stink across the campus like the corpses of rotting Nazis." This occasion was not Baraka's first—or most intense—foray into the world of inflammatory rhetoric. Indeed, this hyperbolic attack was a sign of progress for Baraka, as he cast Nazis, rather than Jews, as the villains.

Today he is best known for his play *Dutchman*, which appeared in 1964, as well as his subsequent contributions to the Black Arts movement (which transposed the ideology of Black Power into the realm of culture). Yet Baraka, once known as LeRoi Jones, has had an extremely varied career as a poet, a playwright, an essayist, a jazz critic, and a political activist. Beginning with the publication of his Beat-influenced collection of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*, in 1961, he has occupied a central place in the world of African American letters. Arnold Rampersad includes him in a pantheon of eight writers, along with such luminaries as Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, and Ralph Ellison, "who have significantly affected the course of African American literary culture."

More than for any single work or movement, though, Baraka is remembered for his inexhaustible and unmatched passion for berating Whitey. When Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman were killed along with James Chaney in Mississippi, Jones remarked that "those white boys were only seeking to assuage their own leaking consciences." By contrast, Malcolm X—not exactly a racial moderate—observed about the murders that "I've come to the conclusion that anyone who will fight not *for* us but *with* us is my brother." When a white college student tracked Malcolm down in Harlem and asked what she could do to help blacks, he answered, "Nothing"; but this harsh (and wildly untrue) comment pales in contrast to Baraka's suggestion: "A woman asked me in all earnestness, couldn't any whites help? I said, 'You can help by dying. You are a cancer. You can help the world's people with your death.'"

Never one to allow logic to get in the way of demagoguery, Baraka declared in 1967 that blacks who listen to European classical music are traitors to the cause. Some self-styled black nationalists, Baraka said, were "schizophrenic" and too "connected up with white culture. They will be digging Mozart more than James Brown. If all of that shit—Mozart, Beethoven, all of it—if it has to be burned now for the liberation of our people, it should be burned up the next minute." And he did not limit his outbursts to public appearances. Hysteria tricked out as analysis has long been a central element of his written work. Baraka delivered his defiantly unpoetic poetry most famously in "Black Art" in 1969:

> Poems are bullshit unless they are
> teeth or trees or lemons piled
> on a step. Or black ladies dying
> of men leaving nickel hearts
> beating them down. Fuck poems
> and they are useful, wd they shoot
> come at you, love what you are,
> breathe like wrestlers, or shudder
> strangely after pissing. We want live
> words of the hip world live flesh &
> coursing blood. Heart Brains
> Souls splintering fire. We want poems
> like fists beating niggers out of Jocks
> or dagger poems in the slimy bellies
> of the owner-jews. Black poems to
> smear on girdlemamma mulatto bitches
> whose brains are red jelly stuck

JUSTIN DRIVER, former assistant literary editor at THE NEW REPUBLIC, is a student at Harvard Law School.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between 'lizabeth taylor's toes. Stinking
Whores! We want "poems that kill."
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
and take their weapons leaving them
dead
with tongues pulled out and sent to
Ireland....

Uttering charged words merely for the sake of uttering charged words does not make poetry; it makes public-restroom graffiti. But it was a measure of those turbulent times that many people derived significance from Baraka's sputtering rage.

Although Baraka's skill with language is exceedingly limited, he has a prodigious talent for shock. His essay "American Sexual Reference: Black Male," written in 1965, makes Norman Mailer's "The White Negro" look like a calm and enlightened discourse on African American sexuality. "The reason the white woman was supposed to be intrigued by the black man," Baraka explained, "was because he was basic and elemental emotionally (which is true for the nonbrainwashed black, simply because there is no reason he should not be; the black man is more 'natural' than the white simply because he has fewer *things* between him and reality, fewer wrappers, fewer artificial rules), therefore 'wilder,' harder, and almost insatiable in his lovemaking." In what appears to be a concerted effort to confirm racist stereotypes, Baraka also thoughtfully provided a justification for why black men would want to rape white women: "Here the black man is called rapist, where even the rolling of his eyes can get him in trouble. That is, the average ofay thinks of the black man as potentially raping every white lady in sight. Which is true, in the sense that the black man should want to rob the white man of everything he has." But not even this sort of madness gained Baraka a reputation for being the charlatan that he was. Instead he was hailed as a genius.

JERRY GAFIO WATTS'S intellectual biography is the most thorough and reliable assessment of Baraka's work so far. Watts approaches his subject with a healthy degree of skepticism, criticizing Baraka roundly for the unbridled hatred that runs throughout much of his work. The problem is that Watts is too close to his subject: he devotes three interminable pages to *Junkies Are Full of SHHH*, a minor play that was written for a Newark audience, while Baraka's important essay "Tokenism: 300 Years for Five Cents" receives a paragraph. Watts also occasionally allows jargon ("social marginality facilitator") to intrude into the narrative. Nobody will ever accuse this book of being a joy to read.

Still, Watts's criticisms of Baraka are usually on target. He rightly skewers his subject for the condescending ways in which Baraka simplified his theatrical writing in an effort to make his work more accessible to the black masses. Baraka seems to have conflated being poor with being stupid. In a novel assessment, Watts contends that the homophobia and the sexism in Baraka's work stem from an effort to cover up his own gay encounters from his Beat days. "He knew that popular knowledge of his homosexuality would have undermined the credibility of his militant voice," Watts contends. "By becoming publicly known as a hater of homosexuals, Jones tried to defuse any claims that might surface linking him with a homosexual past." Watts offers, and condemns, Baraka's "Civil Rights Poem" as a prime example of this compensatory homophobia:

Roywilkins is an eternal faggot
His spirit is a faggot
his projection
and image, this is
to say, that if i ever see roywilkins
on the sidewalks
imonna
stick half my sandal
up his
ass

Among its other sins, it is this sort of drivel that we have to thank for the popularity of "spoken word" and "slam" poetry.

Regrettably, Watts follows the standard narrative regarding his subject's art: it was great when he was LeRoi Jones and it suffered when he became Amiri Baraka. "It is sad to witness the decline of an artist of Baraka's talents," Watts observes. "Once a creative dramatist, he is now content to place polemical essays into the mouths of his characters. A former artistic innovator, he is now trying to revitalize the dreaded aesthetic uniformities of socialist realism." Later Watts writes: "The main reason for reading Baraka's political pronouncements at this stage in his life is to examine how a former serious and creative artist has intellectually deteriorated since attempting to become a political thinker and activist."

Watts dates the beginning of Baraka's decline around 1970, with *It's Nation Time* and *In Our Terribleness*. Those books, to be sure, are dreadful. Yet Baraka's story is not one of artistic decline. He began low. His literary career is one of constantly accelerating race-baiting. While he demonstrated a penchant for attracting media attention, Baraka was never the virtuoso that Watts portrays. In the roiling racial dynamics of the late 1960s and the early 1970s, critics mistook Baraka's anger for eloquence; but the main reason to read Baraka is not to see how much the artist has changed, but to see how much the times have changed.

II.

EVERETT LEROY JONES was born on October 7, 1934 in Newark. His father worked as a supervisor at the post office and his mother was a social worker. Although these jobs hardly made the Joneses wealthy, the family lived far more comfortably than the overwhelming majority of black Americans. Jones performed with distinction in the predominantly white schools that he attended, and graduated when he was just fifteen years old. Following a brief stint at Rutgers's Newark campus, he enrolled at Howard University. It was at the historically black college in Washington, D.C. that, in the first of many name changes, LeRoy altered the spelling of his name to LeRoi. Toni Morrison, Jones's contemporary at Howard, recalled that he "really turned that campus around," but he remembers his experience there as unhappy—particularly in the academic arena. Alienated by what he deemed the pretentiousness of the black bourgeoisie, he disparaged Howard as "an employment agency" where "they teach you to pretend to be white."

His apprehensions about Howard in the 1950s had a basis in reality. A dean once accosted Jones and a friend as they sat down on a bench outside Douglass Hall to enjoy a freshly purchased watermelon. "Do you realize that you're sitting right in front of the highway where white people can see you?" the dean asked them. "Do you realize that this school is the capstone of Negro higher education? Do you realize that you are compromising the Negro?" And Jones once overheard a professor remark that the Howard Players' performance of James Baldwin's dialect-filled play *The Amen Corner* had "set the speech department back ten years." Official Howard even frowned upon jazz. It hosted no jazz concerts during the two years that Jones attended the school. "When they finally did let jazz in," Jones would lament, "it was Stan Kenton." The assimilationist attitudes that drove jazz underground at Howard may help to explain the essentialist claims that Jones later made in *Blues People* and *Black Music*.

Jones flunked out of Howard in 1954 and enrolled in the Air Force, or "Error Farce," as he dubbed it. College had been stifling, but life in the military aroused his intellect. With precious little in the way of diversion on the military base,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jones read voraciously and even dangerously: in violation of military rules, he kept books in his footlocker and read even while on armed patrol. Eventually Jones received a rare "undesirable discharge" because of the communist sympathies he was alleged to have developed at Howard. In truth, though, Jones would not develop leftist sympathies for another twenty years.

JONES HEADED TO Greenwich Village brimming with literary ambition. After working a series of odd jobs, he landed a position at a magazine called *The Record Changer*, where he deepened his knowledge of jazz and met Hettie Cohen, a colleague from a middle-class family in Queens. In 1958, some nine years before the Supreme Court invalidated state laws barring interracial marriage in *Loving* v. *Virginia*, Jones married Hettie. It was, to put it mildly, not an everyday occurrence for a black man to wed a Jewish woman at a Buddhist temple with a jade ring. Interracial marriages in the late 1950s required courage, even in the Village. Jones wrote of "the stares from people on the street, the tension that rose in my own self in certain situations, though for the most part I didn't give much of a shit what anybody, not no white people anyway, thought about our hookup." Jones and Hettie were married for seven years—a tumultuous period in American race relations during which the disapproving stares at miscegenation shifted largely from the eyes of whites to the eyes of blacks. Suddenly it was not Hettie who had betrayed her race, it was Jones who had betrayed his. For all his bluster, he never claimed to be impervious to the judgments of blacks.

Jones began to model his writing on the Beat poets, especially Allen Ginsberg. "I thought 'Howl' was something special," Jones recalled. "It was a breakthrough for me. I now knew poetry could be about some things that I was familiar with, that it did not have to be about suburban birdbaths and Greek mythology." Jones wrote to Ginsberg in France on toilet paper (because he thought it would be "weird") asking Ginsberg if he was "for real." Ginsberg responded favorably (also on toilet paper) and helped to introduce Jones to Frank O'Hara, Jack Kerouac, and the burgeoning circle of Beats. Along with Hettie, Jones launched a literary journal called *Yugen*. Watts depicts Jones as being more of a race-neutral Beat than he was during this period—his first poem in *Yugen* was about segregated bathrooms in South Carolina; but Jones did internalize Ginsberg's "first thought, best thought" approach to writing.

In 1963, Jones wrote *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, a bold project that sought to weave economics, sociology, history, and anthropology into a coherent explanation of why blacks have made so many contributions to American music and why those contributions have taken their various forms.

> The Negro as slave is one thing. The Negro as American is quite another. But the *path* the slave took to "citizenship" is what I want to look at. And I make my analogy through the slave citizen's music—through the music that is most closely associated with him: blues and a later, but parallel, development, jazz. And it seems to me that if the Negro represents, or is symbolic of, something in and about the nature of American culture, this certainly should be revealed by his characteristic music.

Jones thought that a period's song lyrics could be parsed to provide insight into the material and psychological conditions that blacks confronted:

> It seems possible to me that some kind of graph could be set up using samplings of Negro music proper to whatever moment of the Negro's social history was selected, and that in each grouping of songs a certain frequency of reference could pretty well determine his social, economic, and psychological states at that particular period.... No slave song need speak about the slave's lack of money; no early Afro-American slave song would make reference to the Christian Church; almost no classical blues song would, or could, make direct or *positive* mention of Africa. Each phase of the Negro's music issued directly from the dictates of his social and psychological environment.

In sharp contrast to Jones's later work, *Blues People* can seem measured, even nuanced in its valiant effort to explain the development of jazz in America. And Jones correctly emphasized the central role that religion has played in the development of black musicians: "The Negro church, as it was begun, was the only place where the Negro could release emotions that slavery would naturally tend to curtail. The Negro went to church, literally, to be free, and to prepare himself for his freedom in the Promised Land."

Jones wrote well about the music, particularly about the mechanics of bebop; but the strengths of *Blues People* were marred by Jones's desperate attempts to graft his political ideologies onto the musicians whom he admired. He claimed that Dizzy Gillespie was a political radical! And Jones's tortured efforts to view bebop musicians as foot soldiers in the

TO THE PERSON WHO
CAN'T READ,
THIS ISN'T JUST
AN EMPTY SPACE.

IT'S A FEELING THAT
WON'T GO AWAY.

LITERACY PARTNERS

More than 20% of adults read at or below a fifth-grade level. And they pay for it—with limited prospects and lost opportunities. Literacy Partners is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization with a mission to help adults develop the reading, writing, and math skills needed to make a better tomorrow. And your donation is where it starts. If you wish to make a contribution or to volunteer as a tutor, contact us at 212-725-9200 or write to Literacy Partners Inc., 30 East 33rd Street. New York, New York 10016.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

revolution veered beyond the absurd when he praised their drug of choice. "Heroin is the most popular addictive drug used by Negroes," Jones argued, "because, it seems to me, the drug itself transforms the Negro's normal separation from the mainstream of the society into an advantage (which, I have been saying, I think it is anyway). It is one-upmanship of the highest order."

Although the essentialism that would plague Jones's later works was largely absent from *Blues People*, it peeked through on occasion. "Jazz as played by white musicians was not the same as that played by black musicians," Jones instructed, "nor was there any reason for it to be. The music of the white jazz musician did not issue from the same cultural circumstance; it was, at its most profound instance, a learned art." Whites must learn how to play jazz, but blacks are born with the talent. Yet if blacks could intuitively excel at jazz, why did Coltrane work so tirelessly to master the saxophone?

By discounting the hard work required of blacks to become professional musicians, Jones's racialist conception of jazz unwittingly insults the very people whom he wished to honor. As early as 1965, he declared that whites could not fully appreciate jazz music. The gulf that separated the white listener from the black listener, Jones wrote, is "the difference between a man watching someone have an orgasm and someone having an orgasm." In his review of *Blues People*, Ralph Ellison memorably castigated this approach to jazz: "The tremendous burden of sociology which Jones would place upon this body of music is enough to give even the blues the blues."

In 1964, Jones had three plays open within blocks of one another, leading the *New York Herald Tribune* to label him the "King of the East Village." The most successful of the plays, *Dutchman*, won an Obie that year, and Norman Mailer pronounced it "the best play in America." Set in a subway car, the play focuses primarily on the flirtatious interactions between Clay, a middle-class black man, and Lula, a sexually aggressive white woman. While it is shamelessly confessional and often reads as if it was written in a single night (which it was), *Dutchman* successfully creates some dramatic tension because Jones did not yet feel compelled to give all the good lines to his black characters. And yet the play rapidly descends into the very worst of protest art. At one point Clay dismisses "old bald-headed four-eyed ofays" who praise blues singers. "They say, 'I love Bessie Smith.' And don't even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, 'Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass.' Before love, suffering, desire, anything you can explain, she's saying, and very plainly, 'Kiss my black ass.' And if you don't know that, it's you that's doing the kissing." Clay makes a similar claim about Charlie Parker: "Bird would've played not a note of music if he just walked up to East Sixty-seventh Street and killed the first ten white people he saw. Not a note!" Such thinking completely belies the complexity of human emotions, and cruelly reduces black people to the sum of their oppression.

III.

On February 21, 1965, Jones was drinking champagne at a book party on Eighth Street when he learned that Malcolm X had been shot in the Audubon Ballroom. "When Malcolm was murdered," Jones wrote, "... I began to hold all white people responsible, even though in some part of my mind I knew better. But it was this heinous act, which was the culmination of a quantitative and qualitative ideological focus, that made me pack up and move to Harlem and sever all ties with most of the white people I knew, many of whom were my close friends." In addition to the close friends, Jones left behind his wife and their two young daughters. He sought to fill the leadership gap vacated by Malcolm, something that simply could not be done in the company of a white wife. "I was caught downtown with white people," Jones callously observed. "And left. As simple as that. Like one day you got pubic hairs."

Jones's move to Harlem signaled the official beginning of his black nationalist period. After having won acclaim as a poet and a playwright from the mainstream media, Jones was anxious to have larger numbers of blacks exposed to his work. To this end, Jones helped to start the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School (BARTS) on 130th Street. The organization provided classes for neighborhood residents and, drawing on Jones's connections, offered free performances by major artists, including Sun Ra and Archie Shepp. BARTS also took Jones's plays to the streets. Outdoor performances of Jones's works—including a new one that featured a black valet from a popular television show murdering his white employers—garnered considerable attention during the summer of 1965.

Jones's outlandish antics, if not the actual substance of his plays, badly damaged the community-action component of the War on Poverty. BARTS received funding from Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, which in turn was funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity. BARTS's connection to the outspoken Jones distressed Sargent Shriver, the architect of the War on Poverty, who worried that the OEO would be perceived as funding black nationalism. When Shriver attempted to visit BARTS, Jones barred him from entering any of the buildings. In an article in *U.S. News & World Report* headlined "Tax Funds a 'Hate the Whites' Project," Jones was quoted as saying that "I don't see anything wrong with hating white people. Harlem must be taken from the beast and gain its sovereignty as a black nation." There was a good deal of expediency here: Jones expressed no discomfort about a radical black nationalist organization receiving money from the federal government.

Jones lasted in Harlem less than a year before it became apparent that he was not destined to succeed Malcolm X. Toward the end of 1965, he moved back to Newark and proceeded to change his name, beginning with the Bantuized Muslim Ameer Barakat, or "Blessed Prince." Shortly thereafter, under the influence of his fellow black nationalist Maulana Karenga, he Swahilized his name to Imamu ("Spiritual Leader") Amiri Baraka. He would later drop the "Imamu" when people requested blessings from him on a trip to Africa. He had fallen under the spell of Karenga and his seven principles of Kawaida, an amalgamation of Karenga's ideas passed off as African tradition. (Karenga is also responsible for inventing the holiday Kwanzaa, which he initially claimed was an actual African harvest festival.)

Karenga led a California-based Afrocentric cult with which Baraka had some affiliation. Henry Louis Gates Jr. remembers visiting Newark as an undergraduate student at Yale and seeing people bow when Karenga entered the room. Karenga—whom Baraka termed "a political theorist and cultural theorist of great stature"—and his followers hawked *The Quotable Karenga*, which contained gems such as this: "The Seven-fold path of Blackness is to Think Black, Talk Black, Act Black, Create Black, Buy Black, Vote Black, and Live Black." And this: "The only real things that *Negroes* produce are problems and babies." Members of the organization were required to follow any statement during a meeting with this formula: "If I have said anything of value or beauty, all praise is due to Maulana Karenga, and all mistakes have been mine."

Baraka claims that Karenga exerted so much influence over him that he began subscribing also to Karenga's anti-Semitism. Not surprisingly, much of Baraka's anti-Semitic work was written on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heels of his divorce from Hettie. Feeling compelled to prove that he was finished with white women in general and with Jews in particular, Baraka took black anti-Semitism to new depths. In addition to the "slimy bellies" of the "owner jews" in "Black Art," Baraka referred to his ex-wife as "a fat jew girl" in "For Tom Postell, Dead Black Poet," and instructed:

> Smile, jew. Dance, jew. Tell me you
> love me, jew. I got
> something for you now though. I got
> something for you, like you dig,
> I got. I got this thing, goes pulsating
> through black everything
> universal meaning. I got the
> extermination blues, jewboys. I got
> the hitler syndrome figured.

There is no way—politically, culturally, or spiritually—to mitigate this odious rubbish. It should have robbed Baraka of whatever authority he had for his readers.

The late 1960s saw Baraka's descent into the sheerest agitprop. The plays of this period, including classics such as *Arm Yourself or Harm Yourself*, bear a striking resemblance to *Saturday Night Live* sketches: a single poorly conceived idea stretched long beyond its natural life. By 1969 Baraka was arguing that black nationalism was the only appropriate ideology for black writers: "The Negro artist who is not a nationalist at this late date is a white artist, even without knowing it." But it was not long before he yet again veered in a new extreme direction. In 1974, he abandoned black nationalism and moved toward a worldview that he termed Third World Socialism. Suddenly the black nationalism of yesterday was "a narrow nationalism that says the white man is the enemy.... Nationalism, so-called, when it says 'all non-blacks are our enemies,' is sickness or criminality, in fact, a form of fascism." Baraka's view of the world could never accommodate subtlety or complexity. He is always certain. He is always right.

In an interview in 1980, Baraka finally made public what had long been apparent to anyone who had read his work: "The page doesn't interest me that much—not as much as the actual spoken word." Stirring up controversy has always been more important to him than subjecting his thoughts to the demands of logic and reason and decency. Since the early 1980s, his published work has slowed considerably. Baraka continues to give the odd public reading, where he finds it amusing to rhyme "Condoleezza" with "skeezer" (hip-hop speak for a promiscuous woman). But he now seems largely content to live in Newark and be a professor emeritus in the Africana Studies department at SUNY Stony Brook. Last year he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The firebrand has become a dignitary.

Most of the appeal of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka can be explained by the transformation of race relations in America during the 1960s. Blacks made more strides during that decade than in any ten-year period since the 1860s. If one were to plug Jones in as a coordinate on the graph that he proposed in *Blues People*, it would become apparent that it was only as conditions improved for blacks that his apocalyptic ranting became permissible. As Ralph Ellison remarked in a letter to Stanley Edgar Hyman, the very existence of Jones's career undermines his claims: "For if Negro hatred of whites were so universal such black militant writers as Jones wouldn't have to go to such frenzied lengths in their efforts to arouse that hatred."

Baraka enjoyed such immense popularity for a time because he served as a psychic corrective to the unyielding wall of racial repression that confronted blacks in the United States for centuries. When the first fissures appeared in that wall, Baraka's tough talk brought a measure of comfort to many people. It was as if allowing Baraka to vomit up his brand of nastiness would somehow hurry the country along the road toward racial reconciliation. What seemed liberating thirty-five years ago, however, now comes across as nasty and pathetic and contrived. But even in its day many people knew that Jones's fiery rhetoric was nothing more than ugly showmanship. He has been little more than a provocateur whose fame stemmed from an uncommon ability at (to borrow a term from his beloved streets) talkin' shit.

It was not only blacks, of course, who were drawn to Jones's racialist bombast. Many whites also found the new moment liberating. Strangely, the poem "Black People!" enjoyed a particular resonance with radical whites. The poem reads in part:

> ... you cant steal nothin from a white man, he's already stole it he owes you anything you want, even his life. All the stores will open if you say the magic words. The magic words are: Up against the wall mother fucker this is a stick up!... Let's get together and killhim my man, let's get to gather the fruit of the sun, let's make a world we want black children to grow and learn in do not let your children when they grow look in your face and curse you by pitying your tomish ways.

After Baraka delivered an exceptionally impassioned reading of "Black People!" in 1967 at a conference, Gwendolyn Brooks recounted the bizarre scene: "I was sitting beside a youngish white fellow. He had been very quiet. But when Baraka said at one point 'Up against the wall!' this man jumped to his feet and said 'Yeah, yeah, kill 'em.' And here he was ordering his own execution. That's how electrified the atmosphere was. 'Kill 'em all!' he said."

People did not stop championing Baraka at the end of the 1960s. Warren Beatty, whose politics may still be stranded in that era, cast Baraka as a homeless seer in *Bulworth* a few years back. Baraka, who insisted upon writing his own material for the film, delivered a stirring performance with only a few simple lines. "You got to be a spirit!" he cries. "You can't be no ghost!" Later he exhorts the white senator who seeks to become the savior of African Americans: "Don't be no ghost, Bulworth! Be a spirit!" The distinction is not without a difference. Ghosts haunt and frighten, spirits enhance and inspire. Baraka might well have been admonishing himself. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

were touting the flat tax. And, by the way, corporations aren't inherently conservative either: Check the FEC database, and you'll see that the executives who run the corporations that own ABC, CBS, and NBC donate far more money to Democrats than to Republicans. For example, Sumner Redstone runs Viacom, which owns CBS; he donated about ten times more money to Democrats than to Republicans. So media bias in favor of corporations doesn't equate to "conservative" bias.

Rather reported on the concealed-carry gun law passed in Texas while Bush was governor. The story focused on a handful of individuals who committed crimes after being licensed to carry a concealed weapon. It was an anti-gun diatribe like no other. The fact that the Texas crime rate decreased after the law was passed, and that licensed gun users were far less likely to be involved in a crime with a gun than were unlicensed users, was completely left out of the story. This might not seem like a big deal, but it was the last story aired by CBS prior to the start of the first presidential debate between Bush and Gore. But I'm sure the liberal-media reporters like Chait can't see the bias in that either.

Jeremy McCarthy
San Francisco, California

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LONDON DIARIST

The Poet and the Murderer

"POETRY MAKES NOTHING happen," wrote W. H. Auden in a paradoxical homage to William Butler Yeats. But two poets—one an Oxford don, the other Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Britain—did make something happen last week. It was something ugly, but it was news.

TOM PAULIN, A LOUSY BUT FAMOUS poet and a regular panelist on the BBC2 arts program "Late Review," gave an interview to the Egyptian weekly *Al-Ahram* in which he said that "Brooklyn-born" settlers in Israel "should be shot dead.... [T]hey are Nazis.... [I] feel nothing but hatred for them." Paulin's venom toward Israel is nothing new. He once called its army the "Zionist S.S." and charged that it systematically murders "little Palestinian boy[s]." In *Al-Ahram* he explained, "I can understand how suicide bombers feel. It is an expression of deep injustice and tragedy." He did, to be fair, express one scruple about the random butchery of innocent Israelis: He worried that the murders might not crush Israel's spirit. The attacks on Israeli "civilians, in fact, boost morale" among the Jews, admitted Paulin despairingly. If only the Jews would collapse in the face of terror and abandon their country to the people who want them dead.

BUT, AS REPORTED IN THE APRIL 14 Sunday *Observer*, the other poet, Ghazi Algosaibi, Saudi Arabia's man in London for more than one decade, felt no need for such tactical caveats. Algosaibi, it is worth remembering, is one of Prince Abdullah's senior diplomats, the envoy of a monarch whose "peace plan" has elicited cheers throughout Europe. In the Arab world, Algosaibi is known as something of a poet himself. And he has at least once remarked that "[p]oetry is the soul of the Arabs." The ambassador's most recent verse was published in the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*, and it is called "The Martyrs." We know that it was not long in the writing, because "The Martyrs" is a paean to Ayat Akhras, the 18-year-old who detonated herself in a Jerusalem supermarket on March 29, taking two Israelis with her and maiming 25 others. Here's a snippet:

> Tell Ayat, the bride of loftiness...
> She embraced death with a smile...
> While the leaders are running away from death,
> Doors of heavens are opened for her.

And then, in case you missed the poet's meaning:

> You died to honor God's word.
> (You) committed suicide?
> We committed suicide by living
> Like the dead.

And finally, the United States as Satan:

> We complained to the idols of the White House
> Whose heart is filled with darkness.

The soul of the Arabs, indeed!

I AM REMINDED BY *THE DAILY Telegraph*'s Tom Payne of a line by Russian poet Osip Mandelstam about Stalin. "He rolls the executions on his tongue like berries." And, if they had their way with the Jews, so would Tom Paulin and Ambassador Algosaibi. But poets reflect politics; they do not make it. I do not know how many Arabs live in the United Kingdom. But some 15,000 of them marched from Hyde Park Corner to Trafalgar Square last Sunday in a protest that might have led you to believe it was Israelis who were dynamiting themselves to kill Palestinians—and not the reverse. The fatwa faithful from Bradford and Birmingham, Wolverhampton and London's Edgware Road, carried the flag that their cousins might have planted firmly in Palestine had Yasir Arafat not told Ehud Barak (and Bill Clinton) to fuck off.

THE MARCHERS BRANDISHED PLACards accusing Israel of genocide, specifically in Jenin. It will be a bitter pill for them, having conjured up gruesome holocaust images, to learn the truth: There were no more than 200 dead, and probably far less, in Jenin. Of course, any civilian death is a tragedy. But most of the Palestinian dead are not civilians; they are armed combatants. The civilian numbers are this low because of the scrupulousness of the Israel Defense Forces, whose troops risk their own lives so as not to kill innocents. You wouldn't know this from most of the British press. But, then, you wouldn't know it from much of the American press either.

THE "JENIN MASSACRE" IS A CASE IN point. The Palestinians claim the Israelis murdered hundreds of civilians in the city and buried them in "mass graves" to hide their heinous deeds. Their ideological partisans in the media parrot these assertions. Then your ordinary press stiff, having heard it from someone he had a drink with the night before—a nice-enough chap—reports it too. Suddenly, everybody is fuming about Israel's cover-up of a great atrocity. And, in Brussels and Paris, Oslo and Madrid, they are talking about trying Ariel Sharon for war crimes in front of the newly minted international criminal court. As Thomas Friedman admitted a bit shamefacedly in *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, one reason journalists repeat Palestinian lies, and fail to report Palestinian crimes, is fear—fear for their safety on the ground. But that doesn't quite explain those journalists who live in safe, far-off capitals and repeat the same hysterical, Israel-hating lies. To hear them tell it, Israel destroyed homes in Jenin just for the hell of it. But as even superdove Shimon Peres has noted, "There wasn't a house [in Jenin] that wasn't booby-trapped, and there was no way to neutralize the danger without demolishing the structure." And, of course, the Israelis, said Peres, "also encountered booby-trapped men, Palestinians who raised their hands to surrender while wearing explosive belts in an attempt to detonate themselves among our soldiers."

WELL-INTENTIONED EUROPEAN FRIENDS (and even some younger members of my own family) implore me to understand that it is the imagery of these tough Israelis with guns that is inciting anti-Semitism around the world. Yes, it is true; the killing of Jews can no longer occur with impunity and without consequence. But since the year 135 C.E., when Bar Kochba's second revolt against the Romans collapsed, Jews have almost always been without weapons. In the Middle Ages in Germany, they actually exchanged their right to bear arms for the promise of protection by the prince! (It was not long before they were slaughtered.) And so could we not say that this utter defenselessness was also a spur to anti-Semitism? Zionism strived for many ideals, some of which it has achieved. One of these is that Jews no longer go helplessly into the fire. So let us say that in this way we are like the gentiles: a normal community whose blood is not shed easily.

MARTIN PERETZ

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In 20 years, she'll be ready to buy her first home. We're already arranging the financing.

In the next ten years, 65 million families will want to buy homes. Fifteen million for the first time. They will expect low-cost mortgage money to be readily available, just as it has for the last 30 years. So will your children. So will their children.

Our job is to help make sure they're not disappointed. We're Freddie Mac. We exist for the sole purpose of establishing and maintaining a stable and adequate supply of funds to be used exclusively to finance homes. Not cars, not boats, not vacations. Just homes.

It's a very public mission few companies are prepared to carry out. It requires not only a singular focus on homeownership, but what Moody's Investors Service calls a "deeply ingrained risk-conservatism." A company Moody's ranks "among the best financial firms worldwide."

Which simply means "we'll be ready when she is." For more on how we expand homeownership, visit freddiemac.com.

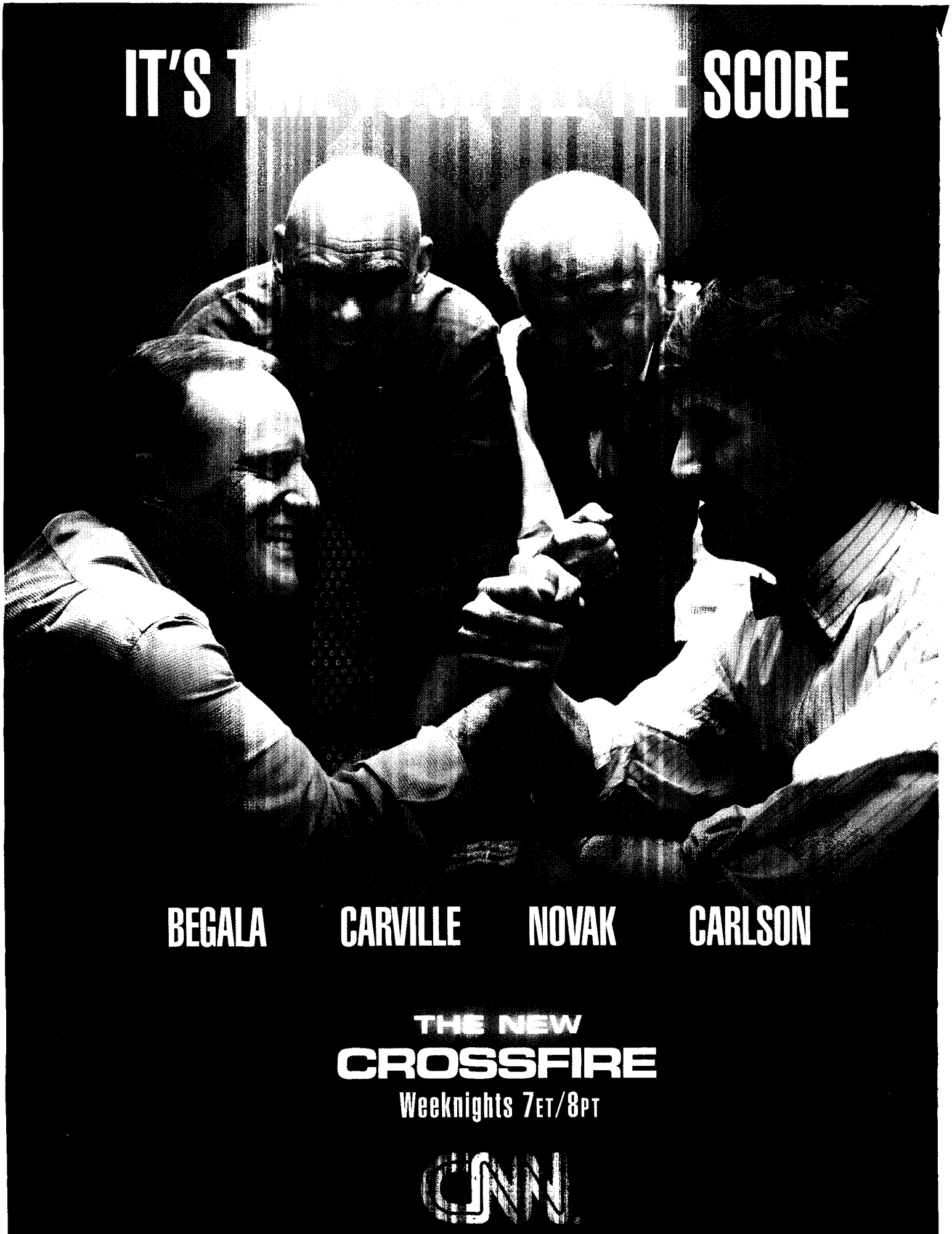
Freddie Mac

We Open Doors®

www.freddiemac.com

©2002 Freddie Mac

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



©2002 Cable News Network. An AOL Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

CNN.com/crossfire AOL Keyword: CNN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED